

A STEPDAUGHTER  
OF THE PRAIRIE  
MARGARET LYNN



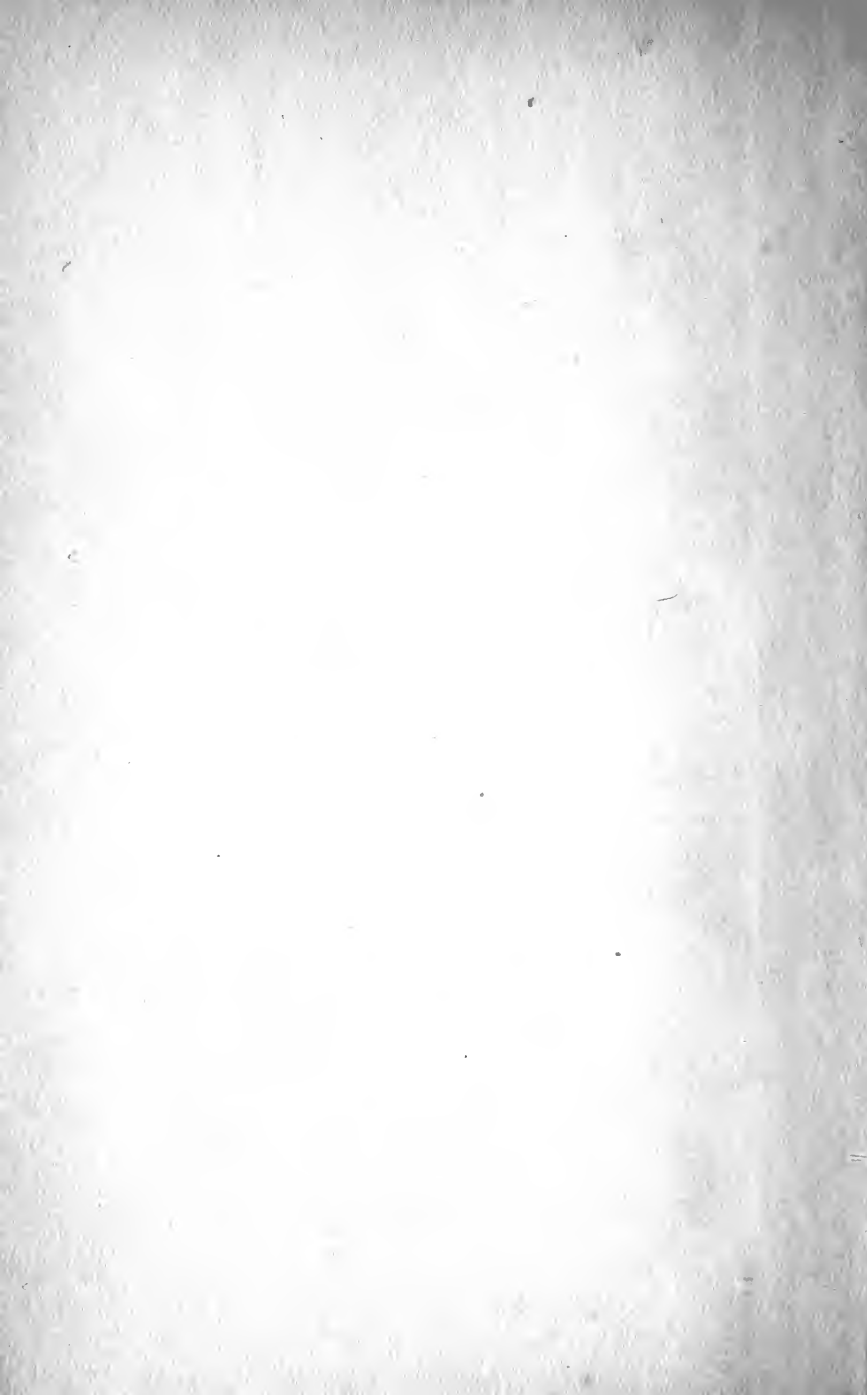
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**A STEPDAUGHTER OF  
THE PRAIRIE**



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# A STEPDAUGHTER OF THE PRAIRIE

BY  
MARGARET LYNN

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**TO  
PRAIRIE LOVERS EVERYWHERE  
AND ESPECIALLY  
TO THOSE WHOSE HAPPY REMINISCENCES  
HAVE FURNISHED MATERIAL  
FOR THESE SKETCHES**



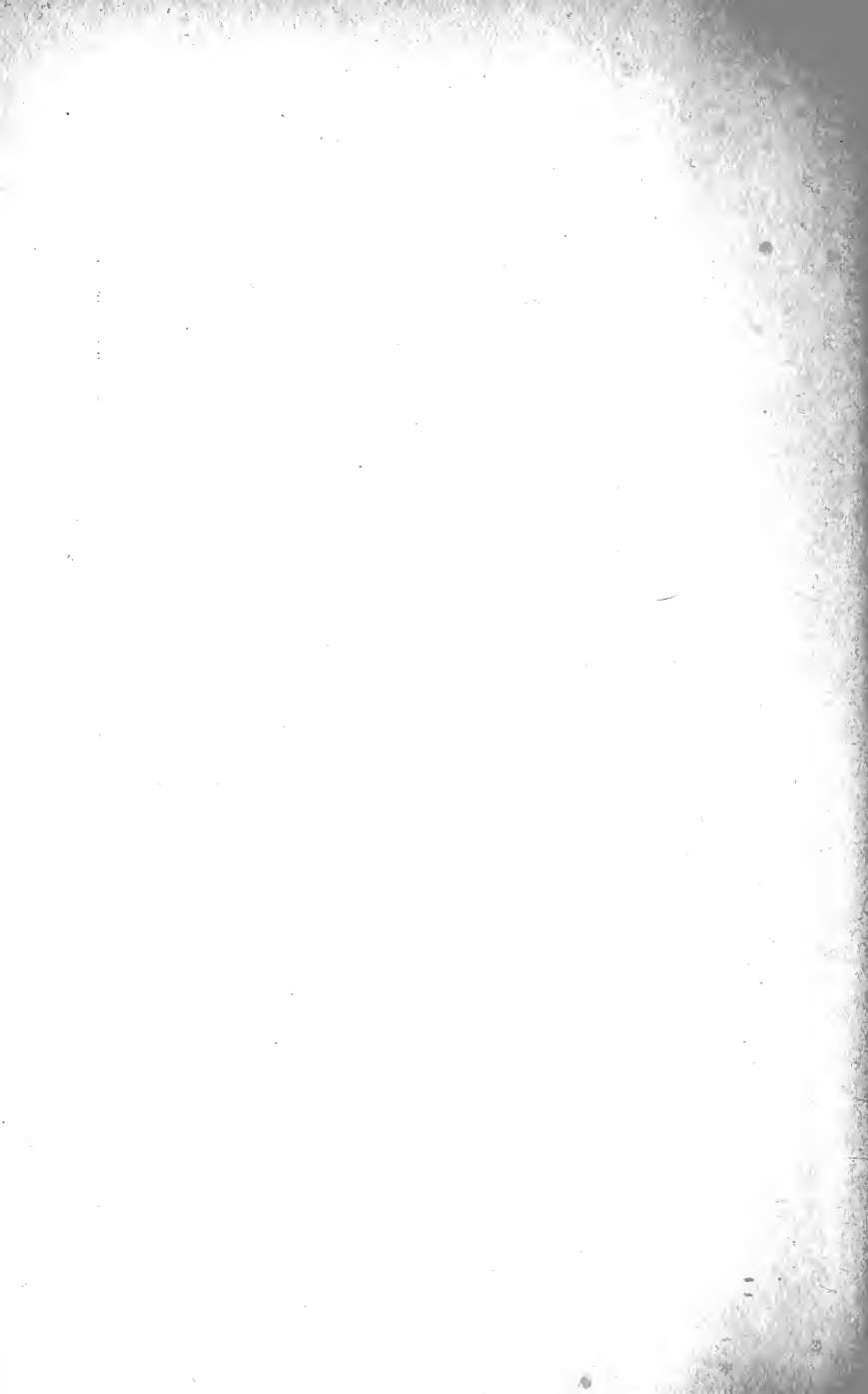
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**A STEPDAUGHTER OF  
THE PRAIRIE**



## A STEPDAUGHTER OF THE PRAIRIE

FAR away on the almost bare line of the prairie horizon a group of trees used to show. There was a tall one, and a short one, and then a tallish crooked one and another short one. And to my childish eyes they spelled l-i-f-e, as plainly as any word in my reader was spelled. They were the point that most fascinated me as I knelt at the upstairs window, with my elbows on the sill and my chin on my folded arms. I don't know when I first noticed them, for they had been there always, so far as I could remember, a scanty little bit of fringe on a horizon that was generally clear and bare. There were tips of other woods farther to the south, woods that were slightly known to me; but this group of trees at the very limit of seeing appeared to lie beyond the knowledge of anyone. Even on the afternoons when I was allowed to go with

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my father on some long ride, and we drove and drove and drove, we never came in sight of it. Yet, when I next went upstairs and looked from the window, there it stood against the sky.

I had no sense of making an allegory out of it. At that age, to the fairy-tale-fed child, the line between allegory and reality is scarcely perceptible, anyway. The Word on the horizon was only a matter of course to me. An older person, had it occurred to me to mention the matter, would perhaps have seen something significant, even worthy of sentimental remark, in the child's spelling out life on her far horizon. But to me, mystery as it was, it was also a matter of fact; there it stood, and that was all. Yet it was also a romance, a sort of unformulated promise. It was related to the far distant, to the remote in time, to the thing that was some day to be known. So I rested my chin on my little arms and watched.

I suppose the fact that the trees were evidently big and old—ours were still young and small—and perhaps a part of some woods, was their greatest interest to me. For no one can picture what the woods mean to the prairie

child. They are a glimpse of dream-things, an illustration of poems read, a mystery of undefined possibilities. To pass through our scant bits of woods, even, was an excursion into a strange world. From places on the road to town we could see pieces of timber. And on some blessed occasions when a muddy hollow was impassable or when the Howell bridge, the impermanent structure of a prairie country, was out, we went around through the Crossley woods. That was an experience! The depth of greenness—the prairie had nothing like it. I think that my eyes were born tired of the prairie, ungrateful little soul that I was.

And the summer shadows in the woods were marvelous. The shadow of the prairie was that of a passing cloud, or the square shade of some building, deepest at noonday. But the green depth of the woods' shadows, the softly moving light and shade, were a wonderful thing. To me these trips put all probability on a new basis. Out on the bare prairie, under the shining sun, stories were stories, even the dearest of them inventions. But in these shady depths, where my eyes were led on from green space

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through green space to a final remote dimness, anything might be true. Fiction and tradition took on a reality that the glaring openness would not allow. Things that were different might happen in a wood. I could not help expecting a new experience. But it never came; we passed out of the timber to the prairie again.

But at least expectation had been stirred. The possibility that something might happen seemed nearer. For Romance was always just around the corner, or just a little way ahead. But out on the prairie how could one overtake it? Where could the unknown lurk in that great open? The woods seemed to put me nearer to the world on whose borders I always hovered, the world of stories and poems, the world of books in general. The whole business of life in those first reading years was to discover in the world of actual events enough that was bookish to reconcile me to being a real child and not one in a story. For the most part, aside from play, which was a thing in itself and had a sane importance of its own, the realities of life were those that had their coun-



terpart in books. Whatever I found in reading, especially in poetry, I craved for my own experience.

There is no bookishness like that of a childish reader, and there is no romanticism like that of a child. For good or ill, I was steeped in both. But the two things, books and the visible world that the sun shone in and the prairie spread out in, were far apart and, according to my lights, incompatible. I always had a suspicion of a distinct line between literature and life, at least life as I knew it, far out in the Missouri valley. Who had ever heard of the Missouri in a novel or a poem? No essays on Literature and Life had then enlightened me as to their relation; I didn't know that they had any. I wished that life could be translated into terms of literature, but so far as I could see I had to do it myself if it was to be done.

One must admit that it was little less than tragic to read of things that one could not know, and to live among things that had never been thought worth putting into a book. What did it avail to read of forests and crags and waterfalls and castles and blue seas, when I

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could know only barbed-wire fences and frame buildings and prairie grass?

Of course there were some elements of our living in which I discovered resemblances to what I had found in my reading, and I was always alert to these things, however small. I admired my pretty young-lady sister, for instance, but I admired her most when she put on the garments of romance; when she wore a filmy white muslin with blue ribbons, a costume stamped with the novelist's approval from the earliest times; or, better still, a velvet hat with a long plume sweeping down over her hair. For some reason I cannot explain—possibly because I knew him then better than I do now—I associated her appearance then with that of some of Scott's heroines. She rose in my estimation—as did anyone else—whenever she managed, however unconsciously, to link herself with romance. When I found after a time, as I grew sophisticated, that she was capable of exciting those feelings in the masculine breast that are depicted with some care in novels, especially in those which were forbidden and which I was obliged to read by snatches and

in inconvenient places, I gave her my unqualified approval for all time.

As I have said, there is no bookishness like that of a small bookworm. In my own little self I did try to make a point of contact between what I read and what I saw. I wished that I dared to use the language of books. I did occasionally indulge in the joy of borrowing a literary phrase. To the grown-ups who heard it, it was doubtless a bit of precocious pedantry or an effort to show off. I sometimes saw visitors smile at one another, and with sudden amused interest try to draw me out; and in stammering prosaic embarrassment I shrank away, no literary fluency left. In reality I was not showing off. I could not resist the shy delicious pleasure of making my own a phrase from one of our yellow-leaved books of poetry. It linked reality with romance. In some way it seemed to make me free of the world of folk in books, whose company I craved. The elders never guessed the tremor with which I ventured on my phrase from Tennyson or Lowell, though I might have been rolling it under my tongue for half an hour. But it would not do,

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I saw, to use the sacred language lightly before unproved hearers, so I generally reserved it for my little talkings to myself. I had my small code of phrases for my private purposes, and a list of expletives rich but amazing. They were gleaned all the way from Shakespeare to Scott; modern writers are pitifully meager in expletives.

But that was after all a thin delight. And to live in one kind of country and feed on the literature of another kind of country is to put one all awry. Why was there no literature of the prairie? Whatever there was did not come to my hands, and I went on trying to translate the phenomena of the Missouri valley into terms of other-land poetry. But even such things as we had, appeared in unrecognizable guise. We had wild flowers in abundance, but unnamed. And what are botanical names to a child who wants to find foxglove and heather and bluebells and Wordsworth's daffodils and Burns's daisy? We—I was not alone in this quest—wanted names that might have come out of a book. So we traced imagined resemblances, and with slight encouragement from

our elders—*they* came from back east where well-established flowers grow—named plants where we could.

There was a ruffly yellow flower with a vague pretty odor, which we forced the name primrose upon. For the primrose was yellow, in Wordsworth at least, and some agreeable visitor had said that this might be a primrose. We invented spurious pseudo-poetic names, trying to pretend that they were as good as the names we read. There was a pink flower of good intentions but no faithfulness, which retired at the approach of the sun, and which we christened “morning beauty.” We had other attempts at ready-made folk names, crude and imitative, but I have forgotten them. What a pity the prairie did not last long enough to fix itself and the things that belonged to it in a sort of folk phrases! At least we ought to have had enough flower lore at our command to give us the sweet real names that may have belonged to its blossoms or their relatives in other lands. When we did learn such a name for some half-despised flower, how the plant leaped to honor and took on a halo of merit!

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Some elder occasionally went with us to the woods, some teacher, perhaps, hungry for her own far-away trees, and we found that we really had a genuine sweet-william and dog-tooth violet and Jack-in-the-pulpit and May apple, and even a rare diffident yellow violet. They were no more beautiful than our gay, nameless flowers of the open, but they grew in the woods and they had names with an atmosphere to them. In our eternal quest for names, some learned visitor—for we had many a visitor of every kind—would give us crisp, scientific terms loaded with consonants. But how could one love a flower by a botanical name?

As days went by, however, even before it was time for me to be taken from the little country school and sent east to learn other things, some conditions had changed. Chance seeds of different flowers and grasses came floating west. In a neighbor's field were real daisies—we did not know then that they were not Burns's—brought in the seed with which the field was sown, most unwelcome to the farmer, but worshiped by us. Our own groves, planted before we children were born, were growing up and

already served for the hundred purposes to which children can put trees. But the ones most generous in their growth and kindest in their service to us we regarded with ungrateful contempt. Who had ever heard of a cottonwood in a book? The box-elder was distinctly unliterary. The fact that these trees had been quickest and most gracious in redeeming new homes from bareness was nothing to us. Even the maple was less valuable when we learned that it was not the sugar-maple, and that no matter how long we waited we could never have a sugaring-off. The trees we were most eager for came on slowly. It seemed as if the oaks would never have acorns. They did come at last, and we were able to satisfy ourselves that they were not edible, either green or ripe, and to fit our pinky fingers into the velvety little thimbles of them, the softest, warmest little cups in the world.

Our grove was an experimental one, as a grove in a new country must be, and held all sorts of things, which we made our own one by one. There were slender white birches, to become beautiful trees in time, from which we

stripped bits of young bark. It was quite useless, of course, a flimsy, papery stuff, but we pretended to find use for it, as we had read of others doing. There were handsome young chestnut trees, bravely trying to adapt themselves to their land of exile. The leaves were fine for making dresses and hats, and we spent long July afternoons bedizened like young dryads. There were so many things to do and to investigate in the earlier months that it was midsummer before we reached this amusement. But we watched year by year for the fruit of the tree. And at last, when the first ones came, we carried them proudly to school to exhibit them for the wonderment of the other pupils, and to apply them surreptitiously to the natural uses of a chestnut burr.

One spring day, in the dimmest part of the maple grove, we found a tiny fern-head coming up from a scanty bed of moss. We watched it for days, consulting at intervals the pictures of ferns in the encyclopedia, and at last, when hope trembled on the brink of certainty, we solemnly led our mother out to identify it. Was it really a fern or only a weed that looked like



a fern? No sacred oak was ever approached with more careful reverence. Our mother, an exile from her own forest country, talked of bracken shoulder-high and rich moss on old gray stones or broad tree stumps. We used to draw in our breath at the wanton riches of fallen trees and stumps. *Big* trees, to cut down! We viewed our mother enviously. But our little frond was something. It drew as great ecstasy from our little hearts as a bracken-covered hillside has ever done. We saw the bracken in epitome, and dreamed of conventicles and royal fugitives.

How I hoarded my little borrowings from the actual to enrich the ideal! A neighbor had a stake-and-rider fence. No doubt he was a poor footless sort of farmer or he would never, in that country, have had one—where all good farmers had barbed-wire, or, at best, rail fences. My father had some hedges, and I was proud of them. They were not hawthorn, but one must be thankful for what gifts fate brings, and I felt some distinction in their smooth, genteel lines. But that Virginia rail fence—I coveted its irregular convolutions and

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deep angles, where the plough never went and where almost anything might grow. Whether it was an older place than ours or a worse-cared-for one, I don't know. But, if the cause were bad farming, it had a reward out of proportion, in my estimation; for the deep fence corners held a tangle wonderful to investigate, of wild grape and pokeberry and elderberry and an ivy the leaves of which must be counted to see if it were poison. They either should or should not be the same as the number of my fingers; but I never could remember which it was and had to leave its pink tips of tender new leaves unplucked. There were new little maples and box-elders, where the rails had stopped the flight of the winged seeds from the small grove about the house. There were tiny elms with their exquisite little leaves. No beauty of form I have ever found has given me more complete satisfaction than did the perfect lines and notches of those baby leaves. There were other plants that I never learned to know. How much better it would have been had all fields had a border like this, ornamental and satisfying, instead of the baldness of a wire

fence. The possession of it gave the O'Brion children an eminence that, while I knew it was factitious, I could not help recognizing.

On our part we had a stream, such as it was. The muddy little creek—we called it *crick*—was to me a brook, secretly. Poor little creek! It did to wade in and to get muddy in, but that was all. It had no trout, no ripples over stones, no grassy banks. It ran through a cornfield and a bit of scanty pasture where its banks were trodden by the feet of cattle; and it did not babble as it flowed. Try as I might, I could not connect it with Tennyson or Jean Ingelow. But I could at least call it a brook to myself. I had other names of secret application. In the spring the dull little stream used to overflow its banks. Then the word brought to the house by one of the men would be, "The crick's out." But to myself I said freshet, and I suppose I was the only one in the whole section to use the old word.

There was an odd little hollow on the hillside above the brook. It was an unromantic spot enough, treeless, distinguished only by its dimple-like contour. But I called it a dell, or in

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intenser moments a dingle or, when I was thinking largely, a glen, and used to make a point to cross it. This was partly because I sometimes found bits of pebbles in the cup of the hollow, and any stone indigenous to the country was a treasure trove. I called the little level place below the hollow a glade, and the hillside a brae, and the open hill-top a moor or heath. Had I used the dictionary more freely I might have applied more terms, but I did not know what a wold or a tarn or a down was, and, lazily, kept them in reserve, fine as they sounded. My private vocabulary, as can be seen, was largely Tennysonian, and I loved an archaism, as something remote from the practical. Whatever excursions I made into other poets, Tennyson was, first and last, my dear delight. My feet were turned over and oft, by the guardians of my reading, into the easy paths of American poetry. I found due pleasure in them, but it was always tempered by a sort of resentment that, though American, their country was not my country. For New England was farther away than Old England, and I always went back to Tennyson. I used to sit

in the dingle in bald sunlight and listen to such unpretentious noise as the creek made, and chant to myself, "How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream!"

The beauty of the prairie is not of the sort that a child perceives. The bigness of it, for instance, I had been used to all my life, and I can't remember that in those earlier days it conveyed any sense of expansiveness to me. In our long drives over it—interminably long they seemed once!—my chief recollection is of greenness and tiredness, a long succession of rolling hills and hollows, and a little girl so weary of sitting up on a seat and watching the horses go on and on. I thought the prairie was just green grass in summer and dry grass in winter. Children are not usually awake to shadings and modifications of color. The coral pink at the roots of the dried prairie grass, the opal tints of the summer mists in the early morning, I did not discover until I had reached a stage of greater alertness.

And the prairie was not suggestive to me at this early time. Looking back now, I guess that it was because it did not hint at the un-

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known. It should have, of course, but it did not. It did not carry me away and away to new possibilities. I knew that beyond these grass-covered hills there lay others and then others—and that was all there was to it. When I saw it face to face I seemed to know it all—and who wants to know all about anything? This was not only because I was a book-stuffed little prig, as I suppose I was. I had imagination of a sort, as it seems to me now, when I recall my pleasure in certain things: in the dim, hovering suggestiveness of twilight and the unanalyzable reverie it put me into; in the half-heard sounds of mid-afternoon in the orchard; in the bend of the young trees in a storm at night, when I slipped from bed to watch them in the flashes of lightning. There was a white pine near my window, “an exile in a stoneless land,” that responded to the rush of the western wind with a beautiful bend and swing. But when in the broad daylight I looked out on the green hills I, in those earlier days, saw no changing colors, none of the exquisite variety of view that must have been there. I saw only green hills.

But had the prairie had a literature—if I could only have been sure that it was worthy to put in a book! If Lowell and Whittier and Tennyson—most of all, Tennyson—had written of slough-grass and ground squirrels and barbed-wire fences, those despised elements would have taken on new aspects. I was a wistful *peri* longing for a literary paradise.

But the Word on the horizon was something. It was far away, but it was real. I did not try to analyze its promise, but it was there.

## A PRAIRIE CARAVANSARY

WHEN we left the county road and turned into the drive, on our way home from school, there was usually a moment of excited expectation among us—unless the interest of getting the tag of the neighbor children who lived farther down the road put other things out of mind for the minute. But generally when we entered, or more likely climbed, our own gate and started up through the maple grove, we dropped school and neighbor children from our minds. Two far more important questions immediately confronted us—what would Maldy have for us to eat, and who would be visiting at the house?

There was a combination of certainty and curiosity in both matters. As for the first, we knew that Maldy was even at this moment looking at the clock and getting out something for us to fall upon. For at any time after four o'clock we were painfully, unbearably hungry,



and we now hurried along the drive as if Famine itself dogged our footsteps. When one came home from school one went to the kitchen door, because when one appeared in the front of the house—if one were a little girl—with dinner-pail on arm and hair-ribbon off and *straight* hair flying and apron mussed and hat hanging by its elastic, *They* did not look approving. For after the manner of children we gave distinct remoteness to the older generation by calling them, collectively, *They*.

Defined extensively, *They* included our parents, who both belonged and did not belong, an intermittent grandparent or two, some floating uncles and aunts, the teacher when she boarded with us, all grown-up visitors who stayed over a week at once, any preachers at the place, however brief their visit, and anyone else who might be regarded as embodying Mature Opinion.

On this occasion the thing to do was to race around to the kitchen door and burst clamorously in on Maldy with ravenous demands for food. Maldy was pretty sure to be cross at this time of day, and to scold us roundly as she

set out her savings for us. Maldy's temper was as uncertain as her origin. What her race was no one knew, and most were afraid to ask. She had some German words of curious form and pronunciation, but when she was good-natured she called us *mavourneen*; and none of the strange men that came to the place ever succeeded in claiming her as a compatriot. But no mere American ever had the instinct for serving that Maldy had, and, if she did assume the right to scold, it was as one long identified with the family and regardful of the morals and manners of its heirs. All the time that she was berating us she was setting before us substantial delights that made us impervious to her scoldings. Anyway, we divided her wrath with other malefactors. While she grumbled at us, she denounced at the same time the constant stream of visitors that came to our doors and interfered with her work and added to the cooking.

Maldy had many aversions, but the first, last, and greatest was "stoppers," as she called them. They were an ever-present trouble to her, for visitors, of one sort or another, were

almost as constant an element in our prairie home as the family itself. Towns were far apart and roads were uncertain, and it was easy to establish a reputation for hospitality. The Plantation, as some one unfamiliar with any farm had called ours, seemed to be the right distance from every place to make it convenient for travelers to stay all night with us, no matter where they were going. This circumstance afforded the second interest that hurried our steps as we neared the house.

What sort of strangers would be there to-day? As we made the last turn in the drive rivalry ran high as to who would be the first to see if a spring wagon—there were only two carriages among all our acquaintance—or top-buggy, or even a lumber wagon, were in sight. If the vehicle were hitched before the house, that indicated merely callers; if it stood out by the barn some one was going to stay all night, and we opened our minds for entertainment. Visitors did not always prove entertaining, it is true, but we kept our eyes on their possibilities. We seemed to live on the edge of a stream of people, constantly passing, but paus-

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ing momentarily as they passed. So far as we were concerned, we regarded the whole thing as arranged for our benefit. In a sense this long, kaleidoscopic line of people, passing by and through our house, was a social world to us. Our very fragmentary knowledge of classes and varieties of people, of professions and grades and manner of living, came, when not derived from books, from our observation of the people who trickled steadily past us.

To be sure we were discouraged by *Them* from intercourse with this rather motley assortment, in which the plain respectability of our own real visitors was mixed with a medley of all sorts of wayfarers. Such a variety of guests as we had! Well-dressed friends from the east, coming out with a detached air to look over the country curiously; relatives, doubtful of the propriety of living so far from a daily paper; speculators and prospectors catching at an accidental acquaintance as a basis for claiming hospitality; prairie folk, prosecuting a newly formed friendship with western readiness; preachers and colporteurs, and propagandists of all sorts, trying to plant their isms

and ologies in a new land; candidates dashing in upon us and offering to stay all night because they were to speak at the schoolhouse; wayfarers of every sort, begging any kind of shelter and pleading the distance to the nearest town; peddlers and agents and movers and cattle buyers; and, ever and anon, passers-by driven in by the storm or stopped by heat or cold.

The approach of a storm was commonly accompanied by a little flock of wayfarers scurrying up the drive to ask shelter. Sometimes they were overtaken and came driven in, all battered and drenched, and stood dripping around the kitchen stove while my mother and Maldy hunted out dry garments of assorted sizes for them. There were times when our wardrobes did not furnish variety enough. I remember one corpulent and jolly matron who sat through the evening robed in a coat of my father's and an ample gray blanket, pinned around her waist; and, on another occasion, a round-headed little urchin who spent the whole of his sojourn with us on the floor behind his mother's chair because he was attired in my

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too-feminine garments. One party committed the enormity, in Maldy's eyes, of returning unwashed the garments they had borrowed to wear home; we heard the tale so often that the second generation were known to us only by their inherited odium. There was one time, referred to for years as the Big Storm, when the house was overcrowded and travelers begged for a place to lie on the floor. The kitchen floor looked to us the next morning—that was a great day for us children, and we rose early to be sure to miss nothing—like a picture of Mohammedans at prayer. Maldy was crossly picking her way around among the prostrate forms, none too careful of outlying fingers, while she prepared a breakfast on the scale of a barbecue.

Haphazard "stoppers" like these were of an entertaining quality far beyond that of the real visitors, who slept in the best bed, and for whom we had breakfast a little later than usual. We knew all about them beforehand, but these strange people who appeared suddenly at our gates and flitted in the morning moved in a halo of the unknown. And in spite of all in-

junctions we would hang about and stare and eavesdrop, alert for dramatic elements. It was possible they represented a whole scheme of life we knew nothing about, and we were always hoping to find in them samples of romance.

There were three general classes of sojourners: those who were given the spare bed—we had the only one within five miles, it was said; those who were put into the big bare kitchen chamber that held three beds and was known as the Barrack; and those who were sent to the barn to sleep on the hay. This class, I must say, struck us as the most interesting of all, and only *Their* vigilance kept us from slipping out to pursue acquaintance with them. We spent a good deal of time in the unsatisfactory effort to match bits of real episodes to books, as a shopper would match goods to a sample, and were always finding misfit specimens of Irving or Dickens.

There was once an opportunity that we regarded as rare. One sleety night an unkempt little old man came driven in, asking, or rather offering to accept, supper and a bed. Maldy

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had my mother out to look him over, and for a moment she stood doubtful, divided between compassion and housewifely scruples. But it was a bitter night, and the sleet on the window decided her. The old man meanwhile stood with an air of indifferent dignity, as if waiting to see whether his offer was to be accepted. It was not until Maldy had set his supper that he made his greatness known. He was, he said, appointed by the government to inspect all cases of hog cholera in Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska; and he was, moreover, next to Fowler, the greatest phrenologist on the continent. Then he looked up under his eyebrows at the little row of youngsters watching him from behind the kitchen table, and made some offhand reference to my too well-known dislike for home duties. And, while I blushed and the boys grinned and nudged me, the old man mentioned, with a casual air, Henry's difficulties with arithmetic; then, as we stood appalled, he followed up these thrusts with other home truths and a side reference to Maldy that made her glower at him across her dish pan.

It was uncanny. We fled to carry the news and



seek reinforcement, and before the scientist had cleared the table—he emptied every dish—the entire household was in the kitchen. Those who were not too squeamish or sensitive had their heads bumped, while the delighted remainder commented on the results. Any witticisms or jeers from the audience were unwise, however, for they drew down on the speaker an estimate of himself expressed without euphemism or reserve. It was the first time we had ever heard of the faded-out science, and the whole affair was as marvelous as second sight. For myself, I shrank from having any too intimate knowledge of my character made public, so I remained discreetly in the background, privately resolving to seek the man early in the morning to get encouragement for my modest hopes of a poet's career. But in the morning he was gone, off on his hog-cholera quest, doubtless, leaving Maldy raging because in return for her kindness he had told her what kind of temperament she should select in a husband.

Phrenology was not the only form of knowledge that came our way. An engaging young man with a cough sat on the porch one summer

night and mapped out the heavens for us, and peopled them with strange forms, until we knew more astronomy than we have known since. Once there came along a reverend old Jew, who asked to be allowed to spend his Sabbath with us, to avoid travel; and my father half-humorously consented on condition that he also spend our Sabbath, and avoid travel. So he stayed, and on the long Saturday and Sunday afternoons gave us children the history of his people from the restoration down. We had never heard of the Maccabees before, and had always supposed that Hebrew history ended with the book of *Acts*. In fact, we had always thought of the Jews as merely a succession of moral illustrations, and we listened with amazement and growing delight to his long tales of romance and tragedy, of persecution and retribution and dreary suffering. It was all told with a passion and a fire of patriotism that made history, any history, for the first time a living thing to us. When he gave us his blessing and took himself and his beard away on Monday morning, we felt as if we had been

on terms of conversation with the patriarchs themselves.

And once there was the most wonderful lady, the wife of a traveling preacher, who recited, or half-chanted, old ballads to us for a whole evening, until we were fairly steeped in the things of balladry. We sat up until nine o'clock that night, and then went blinking off to bed, seeing knights and outlaws and steeds shod with gold. It was with great reluctance that we let her go in the morning. We clung to her after breakfast, and she appeased us by rattling off an Ingoldsby Legend while the men were putting on the horses, and then went gaily away. If her husband had not been there for prosaic evidence, we could never have believed that she was a preacher's wife. We had not had much entertainment out of preachers' wives up to that time. They were too tired and too grayish generally. That one of them could have happy brown eyes and a fresh white dress to put on for supper, and could know anything so well worth while as *Chevy Chase* or *Caldon Low*, was proof to us that our knowl-

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edge, even of our little world, was not yet complete.

With preachers themselves we thought we were fairly well acquainted as a class. Nothing was commoner than to see one driving in on a late afternoon and announcing his intention of staying all night, saying cheerfully, "You know we call this the preachers' hotel." I don't know where so many preachers came from, or why they always seemed to be going somewhere. We had no conception of them as being stationed permanently in a place. They were as much an itinerant class as were the movers, in our youthful experience. Probably at this distance their visits look closer than they really were, but we seem to have been always making acquaintance with new ones or rewelcoming old ones. There were home missionaries, and Sunday-school organizers, and an occasional circuit-rider, and broken-down ministers testing the climate, and candidates, and once in a while a colporteur who left us some new books, rather savorless for children devoted to Scott, but acceptable as being new. We found it a slight objection to the preachers

that, when they were asked to conduct prayers, they always prayed twice as long as was my father's custom. And just after breakfast on a summer morning, when so many things are waiting to do, almost any prayer was long enough. Children are callous little indifferents, and we were grown up before we realized how much severe effort and endurance of hard things, and how many personal tragedies, perhaps, were represented in these men. Fortunately *They* were less indifferent, and no tired minister ever left our door at nightfall.

But on the whole, to our discredit be it said, we did not find much entertainment in the preachers. I am afraid the only one whose periodical return we hailed with delight was the one who made faces. He seemed to have his facial muscles under control so long as he kept his eyes open, but as soon as he closed them, as in prayer, he began to make the most amazing contortions, as if his face played pranks as soon as it was out of sight. The elders, with their eyes properly closed, did not see him. In fact, the position directly in front of him was at a premium, to be schemed or bar-

gained for, and from it we watched him in awful delight, mingled with fear lest our mirth should escape bounds.

One of these same preachers was the first poet I ever saw. I had heard beforehand that this man was a poet, and I was all in a twitter to see him. I had written some experimental and carefully concealed verses myself, and I expected to find either encouragement or discouragement in the very look of the man. And lo, he was a funny little person in a queer, greenish coat, and at the table—I had maneuvered to get the seat opposite him—he had a way of popping his food into his mouth as if he were secreting it, and giving a covert glance around the table after each bite. And he let my father and the candidate for Congress do all the talking. But I still hoped. And, sure enough, he finally got out a volume of manuscript poems and left it on the table while he went for a walk. Manners and poems have nothing to do with each other, and I pounced upon it. It was all written out in the finest, plainest little hand, and all paged and title-paged and everything—printing could not im-

prove it. I opened it at random and began, "Said the Rose so red to the Lily white." That was not a Virgilian dip. I could not condemn the manner, although it was not my own, but I already knew the type of verse in which roses and lilies were capitalized. I tried again and found,

Oh, had I the wings of the innocent Dove,  
 I know what I should do;  
 I'd wing my way to the skies above,  
 And sing my heart out in the blue.

That was not in the least like Tennyson or Moore. I learned then once for all that modern poetry is decadent and that the theological mind is not poetic. And when, an hour later, I heard the little man offering to read some of his poems, I slipped away and spent the afternoon in the top of a maple tree, selecting a new career for myself.

There was one group of travelers that was a constant stimulus to our imaginations—the emigrants to Kansas and Nebraska, the movers. As soon as spring opened they began to pass, going hopefully westward. And until the last bright November days had ended they

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repassed, going back, now disheveled and worn, with signs of hopelessness even we could read. They were objects of great curiosity to us, and more so as the abundant hospitality of the Plantation was not open to them freely. It was even an annoyance to our household that a favorite camping place of theirs was at our gate, and that they came to the house for water, for fuel, for milk, for a quart of flour, for medicine for the baby, for apples, for "light bread," for every sort of provision for nomadic housekeeping. The announcement that movers were at the gate was always followed by an intermittent procession to and from the house, of lank, unshaven men, attended a few feet behind by small boys in long trousers, perseveringly hitched up.

Over the fire down by the gate, dusty-haired women, with a general limpness in manner and movement and dress, were cooking sizzling things in smoke-blackened skillets. I must have seen scores of movers, but I never saw a fat one. And no other class of people could have so nearly the effect of being invertebrate. But to us children they were almost too interesting



to be pitiful; and, had they looked fresh and well-fed and normal, our curiosity regarding them would have been much less. As they were, gaunt and dusty and ambitionless, slack of movement and drooping of eye, they seemed to us almost a race by themselves.

Intercourse with them was forbidden by our elders, but we managed to slip away down to the roadside to watch them, poking our respectable home-keeping toes into the cracks of the gate and chinning the top rail. We tried at first to imagine them into gypsies, heroes of our reading. But we had to give that up. There was a charm and a mystery about the movers, but it was a different thing from the gypsy atmosphere, as we knew it. Even we recognized that these people were ridden by circumstances instead of riding them. We felt vaguely that the movers were not choosing, but slackly enduring. Sometimes there was a superficial bravado about them as they came back eastward, though I don't know that it went deeper than their grimy wagon-covers. On these used to be chalked up the last assertion of courage and gayety. "Going back to our

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wife's folks," we used to spell out; or the couplet that we did not know was already a classic,

In God we trusted,  
In Kansas we busted.

It used to thrill us with what we regarded as its daring irreverence and mocking tragedy. Sometimes the emigrants were young men, only making a throw at fortune, willing to stand the consequences. They came back, if they came, as gaily as they went. But the older men, with their wives and families along, for whom success was a matter of life and death—they went scarcely less soberly than they returned, when the drought drove them back. For the stern land beyond the river was taking its pick of all that came to it, and rejecting all that were mean of spirit or faint of resolve or slow of resource. Those of strongest fiber remained, but the others crept back to the easier land they had come from and its accustomed ways.

Perhaps they were not so pitiable a lot as they now seem to be. Maybe our childish judgment of them was largely a matter of sym-  
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thy, based on their apparently having bacon for every supper and every breakfast, washing their faces always in cold water, and having no lamp to read by in the evenings. We should have thought those insupportable trials. But there was real tragedy, too. Once a wagon came that did not stop on the road, but came right through the open gate, and up the drive to the house. The cover was ragged and gray, and sagged between the hoops like the skin of an emaciated old horse. The horses themselves, absurdly ill-matched, were gaunt and patchy-looking. On the seat, under the front of the swaying canvas cover, sat a woman with a baby across her knees. She was driving, with an evident sense of urgency which she could not impart to the poor horses, for all her futile "Get ups" and slapping of the lines on their skinny backs. "Can I stop here? I've got to stop," she said, with a mixture of shyness and insistence, the forced assertiveness of a timid woman. In the back of the wagon lay her husband, sick unto death. For once our house was open to movers, with every resource and every help possible. The prairie was not yet

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educated to fear of tuberculosis. But in the morning the man died. And then presently there was a little funeral, to which a few neighbors kindly came, and a passing colporteur read a service, and the grave was made just beyond the edge of our lawn. To us children, hovering on the outskirts of an affair in which we had no part, it was all very strange and new. Then the baby and the mother were kept for a few days, while the baby was fed and petted and plumpened and the poor mother was given a little room to take her grief away to. There she wrote a letter and waited for an answer to it. At last it came, and early one morning the queer horses, now fed and rested, were hitched to the old wagon, and the poor widow drove away into the sunrise to meet a brother who was at the same time starting westward to meet her.

There was another time when, as I was sitting with my mother in a summer early twilight, a great slatternly woman tore in through the open door and, it seemed to me, flung herself and a little yellow ghost of a baby upon my mother's lap, moaning, "Oh, ma'am, my

baby's dying—my baby's dying!" I remember with what earnest calm my mother went about her hot baths and poultices and little doses, and how her undisturbed competence contrasted with the impotent frenzy of the other woman. Finally the baby lay quiet in a pale little sleep, and my mother put this woman and child in their turn into the same small room the other had occupied. If she regretted it the next day as a housekeeper, she did not as a Samaritan, and calmly made the room ready for another wayfarer. The child's father, by the way, smoked by his camp-fire all the evening, and received his wife on her return the next morning with merely a grunt, and she climbed into the wagon without a word. We children saw it, for we escorted our guests to the gate and hung on it to see them off and to observe humanity.

I know that there were times when jolly parties camped at our gate and kept us awake with their loud laughter and singing; and I am sure that some of those whose faces were turned westward must have looked thrifty and well-kept enough. But they were too much like the people we knew every day to make much

impression on us. The prairie child has little opportunity to see either crime or poverty. But we couldn't help thinking that all movers were interestingly poor; and, rightly or wrongly, the disappearance of hay and corn, of apples and wood, when coincident with the sojourn of the movers, was laid at their door by the household. We had never seen a beggar or a thief, and we wanted to tremendously; so the general repute in which the movers were held only added piquancy and a sort of literary flavor to our interest in them. We could not help having a romantic regard for the man who, though now negotiating meekly for a little corn, might be going to steal our peaches overnight, or milk a cow at four o'clock in the morning. It was the only moral, or immoral, daring we knew anything about.

There was another itinerant class of endless interest to us. It was a day of grief when the agent began to supersede the peddler. There can be no comparison between the person who hastens light-armed from town to town, enticing his customers with samples or specimen pages or a prospectus, and the peddler, trudging

ing the long country roads with his honest wares on his weary back. At our house we always bought something from the peddler, because we lived so far from the road and it was a pity to have him come all that way for nothing. For the same reason we gave him dinner or supper often, and even allowed him to stay all night. Those were the best times of all, for then he did not open his pack until after supper, and we could all sit round and see it, the children in an inside ring on the floor. Anything out of a peddler's pack was much more desirable than an article from a store. For a store was merely a store; but this pack had been carried and carried along who knew what unknown country roads, and opened in what strange places. It had a flavor of far-off regions.

The little men themselves, with their smooth, commercial obsequiousness and their queer accent, had a strangeness very unwestern. There was a remarkable likeness in their packs when opened out. They always had fringed things with red borders, towels and napkins and tablecloths, "real Irish linen, madam," and a

poplin dress pattern, and beads, and jewelry in alluring settings, and thimbles and combs and zephyr shawls and cotton lace and bandanas and flowered silk handkerchiefs. If we could have had our way, we should have bought the whole pack of charming things outright, and sent the little man back to his mysterious source to get another. And yet the most fascinating part of the whole performance was to see the goods packed away again; we never missed watching him fit all his wares exactly and carefully into place, and tie his square of smelly black oilcloth over them.

Other itinerants claimed a momentary interest. Periodically there were candidates. I believe that of all "stoppers" they were the least interesting. We could never be enthusiastic over the fact that they had little girls at home just our size; while, as for their vociferous talk about the tariff or the rights of farmers, it was almost beneath notice. Such guests always raised the oft-recurring question, why it was so hard for grown people to be interesting. We were quite ready to be amused—no one could have had a more open mind for en-



tainment than we—but why did they so often offer such futile matter for our amusement? Sometimes it used to seem to us that grown-ups, even with all the interest attached to them, were very unsatisfactory. They talked away continually, and we on our part had a thousand subjects among ourselves. Then why could they not establish real conversational relations with us? I suppose they did not know the quality of the curiosity with which we regarded them as we stood around in the penumbra of affairs, apparently dumb with shyness. The fact is, we were not really very shy at all. We were summing up our elders according to our little standards; and while they were talking away so glibly, with an occasional patronizing word to us, we were sometimes wondering hazily why, if they knew so much, they did not know more.

Even Relations often proved lacking in unique attractiveness—for first, last, and always there were Relations among our visitors. Other company had periods of passage or sojourn, and came thickest in the summer months. But neither time nor season, seed-

time nor harvest, affected the ebb and flow of visiting Relations. Uncle and aunt, cousin and second cousin came out of the mysterious east either to pause a few days as birds of passage or to settle down for weeks and experience the country and the climate. They came by train to the railroad station fifteen long prairie miles away, and in the dim early hours some one started with a spring wagon to get them and their luggage.

They always came in with a little flurry of excitement over the long ride and the novelty of the prairie. A conscious spirit of adventure hung about them, especially if they were making their first visit. They knew, and they expected everyone else to be aware, that they were undertaking a great enterprise in coming away out here and bringing their trunks fifteen miles from a railroad. Presently the group of children was introduced and the Relations were surprised to find how big we were and how many there were of us, and got our names all mixed up. That was an ordeal, and none of us came out of it very well. It was a very attractive Relation who kept our interest and respect

through it all. I could not even now wish my worst enemy anything more malevolent than that the whole world could see him while he was being introduced to a family of six children, the parents pervading the scene. They used to fall on me with "And this is Mary!" with evident satisfaction in their cleverness and cordiality—and I was not Mary at all, and the real Mary was no more pleased than I was. Then the elders all talked among themselves, while we children stood around the edges of things and formed provisional opinions of them.

Some time later they turned their attention to us again. They knew the duties of a guest. On our part we were willing but unexpectant, for we had been through the experience before; but, after all, Relations should have their chance, and the credit of the family lay momentarily in our hands. We knew what they would ask—how old we were, and how far on in school, and had we ever got lost on the prairie, and had we a pony, and *so on*. We answered politely, even fully, keeping hopeful watch for signs of originality. But expectation

was really low; it seemed that Relations must always be, not only officially but generically, Relations, and no more.

One part of the interview we did hate tremendously; that was when they settled whom we looked like. We knew we must go through it with each relay of kinsfolk. And what difference in the world did it make whom we looked like?—it was too late to do anything about it now. For my own part I suffered through a year of purgatory while my plain little features were passed upon and hung up on various branches of the family tree. In our own circle it was understood that my looks were not to be mentioned. Pretty Mary did not mind the ordeal. No one ever came to the house who did not find her the exact image of a mother or a daughter or a sister. Her case was easily settled. But me, alas, no one claimed. The Marshalls remarked that I got my mouth from the Johnsons, and the Johnsons ascribed my nondescript little nose to the Marshalls. I easily learned to recognize the tone of mingled toleration and superiority with which Relations spoke of the other side of the

house. Finally a happy soul made the discovery that I looked like some extinct branch of ancestry, and brought out some infamous old daguerreotypes to prove it. One look at the pictures was enough for me, and I never saw them again except in dreams.

After the second day the visitors bothered us little. At least if they were the ordinary negligible adults we saw very little of them, for all day long we were about our own pursuits. Of course, they were sometimes of didactic tendencies, and then we had to protect ourselves from them. There was a sweet-looking cushiony old lady, for instance, who seemed at first sight to be the very balm of Gilead. I hung about her a good deal at the outset, for her sweet, bookish language. She referred to my frock and my pinafore, and asked me to pluck her a bloom. But I found that she had a way of looking appraisingly at me and saying, "Isn't there something a little girl like you could be doing to help her mother?" That always gave me a moment of embarrassed silence before I faded away into the outdoors. Domestic duties lay strictly between my mother

and me, and it was indelicate for an outsider, even if she were a great-something, to intrude.

There was a companion piece to her, an old gentleman on the other side of the house, who used to turn on me with abrupt questions about trivial facts. He would interrupt his conversation with the elders on my approach to interpolate, "Well, and where are the Himalaya Mountains?" or "And what can you tell me about Hannibal," and multiply my confusion by recalling the fact that *he* had read Rollin's *Ancient History* through before he was ten. If these two persons happened to visit us at the same time, we avoided the house entirely during their stay, except when we unobtrusively slipped in to meals.

Of course there were jolly young uncles who played croquet with us and gave us a hand up on the pony, and were altogether human; and young lady cousins, with pretty clothes and new hairdressing, who helped to make magazine stories realizable. And we liked the general atmosphere of company—real company—in the house. Discipline insensibly relaxed somewhat—the haphazard "stoppers" only

had the effect of making it more careful—and we were, both physically and intellectually, less the objects of conscientious attention. Guests hardly realize what a boon they may be conferring upon the children of the family.

But all these conditions of life changed even while we watched them. Neighboring places thickened up on the prairie. Towns came nearer, and bridges and roads appeared. Before our childhood was over the far horizon had lost its smooth prairie line and was notched with houses and trees. The procession on the road was fuller than before, but it did not pause so often. Presently we ceased to see the rounded canvas top of a mover wagon at our gate; and trudging peddlers gave way to glib agents. The sudden hurry and flurry occasioned by the unexpected arrival of guests or pathetic wayfarers occurred less and less often. Hospitality became a matter of choice, not a requirement of bare humanity. The glamour of the highway passed; the Road became merely a road. And we, alas and alas, grew up.

## THE URBAN TEST

UNCLE HENRY was talking to my father down by the yards one evening—I was hanging on the gate and I heard him.

“It’s all right for you and Mary,” he said. “You seem well enough satisfied out here. But what about the children? You can’t let them grow up ignorant. They really ought to be having proper advantages.”

I turned my head and seemed to be looking inattentively the other way. At an interesting point in a conversation it was customary, I had learned, to devise some errand for any children within hearing, and I did want to hear what my father was going to say. But he only looked thoughtfully across at my brother Henry sitting in the open door of a low barn loft, his legs dangling happily in space.

Uncle Henry’s young son Ahthuh (only we said Arrthurr, except when we were making fun of him behind his mother’s New England back) was seated painfully aloft on our tall old



Jude, his knees hugging Jude's lean sides; and Henry was joyfully daring him to dismount by the natural method. But Arthur looked fearfully at the distant ground and curled his feet up higher. Finally he urged Jude slowly up to a convenient fence, stretched an exploring foot to find the top rail, and slid carefully off. Henry meanwhile produced a long stick from the hay behind him, pole-vaulted airily down from his perch, and came over to join us, pausing on his way to give a proprietary dig to the well-rounded side of his pet calf.

"What did you name your calf, Henry?" asked my father, leaving Uncle Henry unanswered for the moment, to my disappointment. That interesting discussion was evidently to be deferred until there were fewer children about.

"Eurydice," said Henry simply.

Uncle Henry adjusted his glasses and looked with interest at the spotted myth, at this moment engaged in securing unmythical sustenance, bunting the maternal side, and stamping and whisking in an ecstasy of appetite.

"I never saw a calf named Eurydice before," he said. "Does she come?"

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Henry obligingly experimented with a half-screech, half-whistle, a wild travesty of lyric notes. The calf waved its tail blandly, but did not look around.

"Sometimes she does and sometimes she doesn't," he said. "That's why she's Eurydice."

"Who was Eurydice?" asked Arthur.

But he was unheeded because Henry was saying jeeringly that I had named my calf Zenobia Joan-of-Arc Victoria, and I was answering spiritedly—having brothers helps to nourish one's spirit—"Well, I only had one calf."

Uncle Henry laughed, more than I thought was needful. Everyone knew that it was our privilege to name the animals on the place, if they were distinguished enough to deserve names, and that the spring crop of beasts wore evidence of all our winter's reading. So there was really nothing much to be amused about. Of course, in the result, strange companions were housed side by side. Daniel Boone espoused Cleopatra, and Silas Marner nosed his feed-trough in belligerent fellowship with

Æneas or Elaine. For a while we named animals after relatives and acquaintances, but that custom led several times to embarrassing episodes, and *They* bade us desist, even when tempting resemblances clamored for recognition.

We usually had a waiting list of names, and quarreled regularly over the privilege of godparenting the blinking new occupants of the yards and stables. Henry and John said Mary and I had no sense of fitness of names—colts should have different kinds of names from kittens. It is true that my confidence did have a blow occasionally. After I had bought, with my half of one of Maldy's turnovers, the authority to name a pet chicken Felicia Hemans—Henry wanted to call it *Ivanhoe*, but I had just committed *He Never Smiled Again*, and I was firm—and Felicia grew up to be the most quarrelsome, gamey old rooster we had, I became less assertive of my rights and judgment. When the appearance of his first tail-feathers bore an appalling truth to me, I tried to meet the circumstance by cutting them back to an appropriate feminine length. But masculinity

will tell in spite of dress. I could cut off the tail-feathers, but I could not eliminate the crow, the right and sign of his sex. So I only made Felicia Hemans ridiculous for life, and myself so for nearly that long.

But, after all, the naming of animals is a mild amusement, and no one but ourselves saw much fun in it. Arthur did not care for it in the least, nor did any of our other visitors. And after Uncle Henry had got through laughing at me he walked away with my father. I gave up following them, as I had first thought of doing, and let the rest of their conversation go unheard. Arthur, apparently with a sense that he had been appearing to disadvantage, began to tell us of a dog-and-pony show he had seen. We had never seen a dog-and-pony show, and Arthur's familiarity with one seemed, in his mind at least, to compensate for his inability either to stay on a horse or to get off one. In fact, it somehow appeared to be a credit to him to have seen the show, and before he had finished his account his recent mortification was forgotten, and he was patronizing us and condescending to us after his usual fashion.

There is no superiority so superior as that of the ten-year-old.

It was a superiority we often met. It was really exasperating, the attitude toward us and our experience assumed by children who came with their parents to visit us. Usually visitors who came on the train left their children behind them, having dark fears and suspicions concerning this strange and unproved land to which they were coming. Actuated by the vague but powerful apprehension that "something might happen," they left their offspring behind within the safe confines of the long-sanctioned East, where we were allowed to suppose that nothing happened, and risked only themselves to the possibility of an experience they had never had before, and the undesirable chance of a new sensation.

But occasionally an adventurous and Providence-trusting parent brought a child or two along, to expose them to the prairie, as it were. We hailed them always with delight, for there were none too many children to play with out on the prairie, and such as we knew were often either inaccessible or forbidden. The little

broken-speeched Germans on the east of us, and the sandy little Irish on the west, were as impossible as the little aborigines in the hollow, who came from the bluffs and had underwear made out of discarded flour-sacks. Undemocratic Mady thought them all beneath us, and all but forbade them the place. She was so vigorous and so vigilant in the enforcement of her prohibitions that it was not necessary for any of the other elders to make any. As for the acquaintances we made at school, we generally left them behind at school, and all summer long did not see them. It will be seen that we were meagerly furnished with companions of the right age; that is why our parents used to urge visiting friends to bring their children with them.

The experiment had variable results, though it always started with the same promising beginning—from our shy welcome of our guests in the presence of the elders, to the moment when we dexterously segregated them from the hampering grown-up society and took them to the outdoors, the only place where acquaintance could really begin. Before the end of the

first day something was defined, usually; the subtle adjustment of eastern sophistication and western immaturity, to use a euphemism, was begun. But let no one think that such an adjustment was easily accomplished. Two such combinations of elements required nice balancing. On the one hand was the God-given superiority, modestly but inevitably expressed, of the comer from beyond the Alleghanies. Coupled with this were the misbegotten but wholly natural vanity bred of contact with street-cars and grade-schools and ice-cream sodas and electric lights and fire companies, and the augmented importance of the recent three days' trip on the train, with all its experience. It is hard for the most modest person to go three days from home and not derive added importance from the circumstance.

Beside all these glories what had our meager experience to show? We were on our own ground to be sure, but when it comes to matching tales that is not an unmixed advantage. We could ride our ponies like little Indians, but our visitors could tell of a Wild West Show. We could beat them out and out at chess and

such things, but they knew roller skates and skating rinks. We were regular little Tom Twists, but they had seen league games, even football games. We had read more books than they had looked into, commonly, but they had been to vaudeville. Our disadvantages are plainly to be seen.

Our little resources and amusements used to shrink and seem colorless before their critical eyes, and, had it not been for some degree of contrariness in ourselves, we should have been almost ashamed of our meager sources of entertainment. The little city-bred visitors did not see any fun in our many-roomed playhouses, with pursley for door mats; or in our rival farms staked off elaborately in the orchard, with fields for all kinds of grain and small potatoes for cattle in one pasture and grains of white corn for sheep in another, and tiny rustic dwellings constructed on a basis of crotched twigs. They did not enter with sufficient zest into the half-dozen games in which tumbleweeds played a part, for they did not see the possibilities we did in the erratic elusive globes, bounding alertly over the ground with a life of



their own—frolicsome, teasing things, that invited and then avoided, and put the very impulse of play into one. Why has no one sung the lyric of the tumble-weeds? But our visitors put themselves altogether in the wrong by seeing in them only dry weeds.

Nor did such visitors follow us very sympathetically in our borrowings from books to enliven actualities. They did not care for long games of chess, in which Macbeth was pitted endlessly against Julius Cæsar, or for the daily reproduction of the Punic wars in every sort of contest, from berry-picking to forbidden races on the lumbering farm-horses. That was an affair that never ended—there really was no reason why there should not be a thousand Punic wars as well as three. It was our way of exercising the delight of partisanship, which everyone must find in some form. Henry, with large, masculine vision, helped to his conclusion by the *Supposed Speech of Regulus*, insisted that the success of Rome was better for the world, and I didn't see what that had to do with it. For my part, my imagination was fired by Hannibal's vow, made at an age that

seemed to put him in our class, and by the ever-dramatic descent into Italy. My imagination was at fault, however, for I fear I never quite lost the impression of a picture I early formed of him seating his army neatly on a glacier and sliding nobly down to the gates of Rome. Anyway, rivalry on such an epic scale had a great fascination for us, and for one whole summer we gave life to everyday matters by weaving it into them. But we found it hard to interest our grade-school visitors in it. They knew more dates than we did, but they did not know how to snatch the dramatic from the historic for their own delight.

We were not very good hosts, I am afraid, for we frankly tired of continual activity and returned to our books for hours at a time. It was a severe test of the virtue of hospitality to be obliged to give up one's personal habits. And who would want to give up the long afternoons when we lay stretched on the grass under a box-elder tree, two reading from one book which neither could wait for, with elbow to elbow and shoulder to shoulder, and no word between us but, "Ready to turn?" Who could

give up reading like this, even for company? We didn't always, I am sorry to say, and were frequently snatched back from happy isles with the chiding reminder that we must be about entertaining our guests. The spirit in which we returned to our social duties was no credit to us.

Some of the children caught the spirit of our games and so endeared themselves to us. But some of them, very ill-trained from our point of view, could find no use or charm in any toys that did not come out of a store, all adapted for a specific purpose. They did not know the joys that we knew in using things for purposes for which they were never intended; and it is a joy that cannot be taught. One little slender-legged maiden would not play out of doors at all, because we had no sidewalk and the ground hurt her feet.

But there was one point in which they all found delight. That was in telling us about the things that they had and we did not have. The field was large, but I must own that the expositors did justice to it, for no department of it was left unvisited. I think they had not

known how great their opportunities and advantages were until they came to see us, who had not had the same. Then, upon discovering their own distinction, they spread themselves like little bay-trees, with every leaf a brazen horn, and boasted loudly of everyday matters which they had always before taken for granted. It must have been a very great descent for them when they returned to their own kind and lost this transient factitious importance. I suppose that they then began to boast of their western trip.

It was not that we objected to being told things. In fact, we rejoiced in every picture of a world outside our own. But it was the manner of telling that irked us. In our own plain language, we couldn't stand bragging. We disliked Arthur's assumption of proprietorship of everything east of the Mississippi. Being still very young, we did not know how hard it is for one to go away from home and not take credit to himself for everything of merit or interest in his habitat. We could not know, then, that even we should in time be ar-

rogating to ourselves all the virtues and charms of the West.

When they could keep the element of personal satisfaction out of it, we listened to their account with the greatest delight. There was nothing we did not want to know. We had never seen Coney Island or Central Park or parades or floats or soldiers or theaters or elevators or water works—or a thousand things that we were most willing to hear about, if the account were properly given. No wonder the limitations of our knowledge invited illumination.

It was this painful lack of experience on our part that Uncle Henry referred to in his talk with my father, and that led him, before he and Arthur left that summer, to make his Great Proposition. He would take us benighted younglings to the nearest city for a day and put as much enlightenment as could be into twelve well-spent hours. He could not bring up all the arrears of a neglected education in that limited time, but he could at least show us some of the things that were worth while, like elevators and illuminated signs. And incidentally he

could treat himself to the never-to-be-outgrown delight of causing surprise and giving a sensation. One likes to cause amazement, even in a child. That interpretation of his motive, however, is a surmise of later years.

Anyway, the elders yielded a dubious assent, and Henry and I—the rest were too young or too old—were to go to the city for a day, under convoy of Uncle Henry, with Arthur as *aide*. And, ah me, the things that we were to see!—things we had heard of and read of and dreamed of, but had only glimpsed occasionally on trips with our parents. Arthur's elaborate tales could not surpass our imaginings. Uncle Henry was a benefactor of benefactors!

To go to the city meant to rise at a period of the night that children hardly know exists—in fact, scarcely to go to bed at all—and to drive away through the still darkness to take a train that gathered us up and carried us on toward a faint, faint streak of the early summer dawning. It was all a tremendous experience. To be called out of sleep and to see midnight for the first time in our lives, so far as we knew, and find the elders all walking around

and doing things that were done in daytime; to discover that cocks crowed in the middle of the night, and to sit down, in the echoes of Felicia Hemans's retort to a rooster across the creek, to a meal that was neither supper nor breakfast, but had all the best elements of both—that *was* a beginning! Even to have *Them* solicitous that we should eat enough gave a rare sort of introduction to the whole affair.

Then came the swift ride along the prairie roads behind our fastest horses, and we faced the midnight charm of the sky, and saw the pale, useless thread of a moon glide under or out from the thin clouds, while the constant spat, spat of the horses' feet went steadily on.

My mother's last solicitous words had been, "See that they don't fall out if they go to sleep." Arthur did promptly go to sleep, after wishing that we had some arc-lights along the road; and Henry, too, finally yielded. But sleep never touched me on all that long ride. Everything was too wonderful for that. Whatever great things we were to see on the morrow, the dark was enough for me now. I seemed never to have known a real dark before.

Sometimes the clouds gathered and swept up almost threateningly, and everything was hidden but the faint line of road ahead of us and a vague suggestion of the stretches of land on each side. We crossed a long bridge that seemed to span Nothing. I could have found a horror in it all if delight had not made that impossible. There was no need to people the gloom with horrors of any sort. The darkness was living enough. I had sometimes wakened for a moment in the night and found in the blackness of the room a mere negation which I had given quality to by fancying the Things in the corners before I dropped back into sleep again. But this darkness needed no mere fancies. When we went through some bits of timber and the man driving pulled the horses down to a slow, cautious walk, I met a Dark I had never known to exist. The shadows of the trees could not accentuate it; the places where thick shade lay in daylight had lost their distinction. I stared into it with all my might, trying to explore its degree. But nothing met me, only its assertion of itself. My eyes ached



with staring, but I did not for a moment tire of its uneventful blackness.

But we would come out from the woods again, and the clouds would scatter and grow thin, and the prairie would lie spread out in the pale light. For we were following the bias folk-roads that wound along ridges, skirting farms, or dipped into an occasional hollow to cross a little stream. Everything lay in a faint, almost unmarked gray. But it was a gray that was warm and distinct, for under it lay the living green of the prairie, or of the young crops on a farm. It faded off into mist on an indistinguishable horizon. The same cold night mist lay in the hollows by the streams. I breathed hard to get the full effect of its coldness. I had not dreamed that the prairie held such mystery as the night gave it. The steady baldness of the day was gone. The very fact that it could so change its appearance and present itself as a thing strange to me, made it into a wonder.

Arthur and Henry slept on through all the jog and jostle of our quick ride, and Uncle Henry and the man who was driving us talked

about the price of land. Men were always talking about the price of land. So far as I could tell they were always saying the same thing. I believe that their talk affected my notions of the prairie, unprecocious though I was, and helped to make it the unromantic thing it had thus far seemed to me. A man could buy up miles of prairie—a whole landscape, in fact—at so much an acre, and write his name on a little strip of paper to pay for it all. I had seen it done; and, while I admired the man, comparing his resources with the loose-rattling contents of my little iron bank, I couldn't help thinking less of the prairie, thus handed about as a chattel. All the triple-laid gold of a hillside of sunflowers, or the generous waves of the slough-grass, could be transferred from man to man in a five-minute transaction. After I had seen it done, beauty seemed less an absolute thing than before.

After the ride came the train, where we all cuddled down and slept for hours. And after the train and breakfast came—the City.

“You'll be surprised to death,” said Arthur for the fourth time, as we emerged from the

station hotel, our feelings in leash for the great experience.

We had already been surprised, though we had not mentioned the fact, by certain peculiar flavors in the hotel breakfast, and by the difficulty of sitting down in a chair while it was being pushed under us. We had looked with interest at the liquid called cream, and the solid called potatoes. They were novelties to us. But they were mere details, and we put them aside for the moment, to consider fully at a later time, and came out of the dining-room all alert for the world. We *longed* to be surprised, even to the point of spasms.

“There’s a policeman!” exclaimed Arthur, as we finally emerged on the street; and Uncle Henry looked expectantly at us.

We looked the policeman over. We had been familiar with his figure ever since we had had one in an early box of toys, and we had seen, first and last, some dozens of pictures of policemen, all of them exactly alike. This was undoubtedly a policeman. We recognized his well-filled blue suit and his supine majesty.

“That thing he wears is a helmet,” said Ar-

thur, "and that stick is his billy. It's awfully heavy."

As we had not been trained in the conventions of conversation, it did not occur to us to reply to the obvious, and we remained silent. A policeman was an interesting object, and his moveless grandeur was very impressive, but unless he would obligingly arrest some one before our very eyes we saw nothing to say about him.

They kindly passed over our silence as due to our rustic stupefaction, and we moved on.

"That building is fifteen stories high," said Uncle Henry respectfully, as we turned the corner; and he led us across the street to where we could take in its full magnificence.

"It's pretty high," we said, throwing appreciation into our voices, as Uncle Henry waited for our awed comment. But really it looked just as we had known it would. Having seen a one-story building, we could easily imagine a fifteen-story or even a hundred-story one, for that matter. It was merely a process of multiplication, and our imaginations had been stimulated by a course in mental arithmetic.

Well, details are embarrassing. Even now I don't like to go over the events of that day. Uncle Henry was most devoted, and Arthur was an indefatigable cicerone. If we did not see the whole of the impedimenta and artillery of the army of industry it was not his fault. He even dragged us off after dinner to see a park. Fancy showing a pathetic made park to country children, even prairie children. We did not think much of it. We saw buildings and buildings, and streets and streets, and fire boxes and letter boxes, and surface cars and elevated cars, and wonderful stores and a fine hotel and a fire station and elevators and the central post office and an opportune funeral and the Salvation Army and a boy that was begging, actually, and a blind man and a sandwich man—and everything else worth seeing. And we had an ice-cream soda and saw part of a *matinée* vaudeville.

But, on the whole, the day was not a success. Uncle Henry found us dull little stupids to play the guide to: He, I privately suspect, had seen himself in the rôle of a beneficent and well-informed fairy, showing off the city to us with

urban toleration of our ignorance and amusement at our excitement. But instead of being entertained—and indirectly flattered—by our wondering and ecstatic comment and deliciously amusing blunders, which he could repeat to the people at home as illustrations of western ignorance, he found us stolid and inarticulate. We failed to wonder in the right place or we admired in the wrong place, and Arthur said over and over, “Well, you certainly are queer kids!”

Once when Uncle Henry met an acquaintance, and they talked apart a few minutes, I heard him say, “Yes, it’s surprising what a difference there is between city children and country children. Now, my Arthur——” I was more inarticulate than ever when he rejoined us.

But really we were not seeing such novelties as he supposed. For the most part we were merely identifying the material forms of things we had heard about and read about and seen pictured, all our little lives. We were delighted enough to see them, but we were not in the least surprised. They filled our expectations

—or if they did not we thought it impolite to say so, as Uncle Henry took such a proprietary interest in them. But there was nothing much to say about them. So we merely looked and were ready to pass on. And no guide, not even one paid by the hour, would like that.

The fact was, it was as much a disappointment to me as it was to Uncle Henry. I don't know what I had expected, but I had thought things would be different. I suppose the mystery of the night ride was a bad preparation for the matter-of-factness of the city day. Perhaps, if Uncle Henry and Arthur had not known so much and rattled off so many facts and explanations, things would have gone better. But they didn't leave a single possibility unprovided for. When they got through, a street car was simply a street car, and an elevated road merely an elevated road—not a thing for strange, unknown people to go to strange, wonderful places on, for all sorts of unguessed purposes. Mysterious buildings changed before our very eyes to steel and brick and stone, and what went on within them became a negligible thing.

But, on the other hand, there were the people, and no one could tell us about them. I wished they could. What were trolleys and tall buildings and elevators? The crowd was the thing. I stumbled along, upheld by Uncle Henry's coercing hand. He thought my eyes were on store windows and street cars and beer wagons and such things, but they were not. Where were all the people going, and where did they belong, and who were they, and who lived at home with them, and what were they *doing*? Every one of them might belong to a kind of life I knew nothing about. When I stumbled or pulled loiteringly at Uncle Henry's overtaxed arm, it was usually because I was following some face of a quality I had never seen before, or trying to catch flying bits of talk as speakers passed. This was the stuff that stories were made of—if I could only get at it. I was divided between rapture and poignant perplexity. The world was all there, but I could not touch it.

A carriage stopped in the street, and a gentleman handsome enough to be anything came to it and talked deferentially to a lady inside.



And to this very day I want to know what he was saying. Two ladies in wonderful dresses and more wonderful hats waited on a corner for a car, and they talked so earnestly that they let their car pass—so I gathered from their gestures. And what were they talking about? And in another place a carriage drove up in a great hurry, and a man jumped out and dashed into a building, an uninteresting building with nothing in the windows. But why was he in such a hurry?

Once a lady who was visiting us had with her a copy of one of Mary J. Holmes's novels, and I surreptitiously began to read it. But before I had reached the end of the first chapter the lady departed and her novel with her, and I have never yet had a chance to finish it. It is a tragedy almost beyond parallel to have the full cup of a luscious novel snatched away from you when the first sip has barely passed your lips. Not all the other novels in the world will ever compensate for that lost one. That experience was multiplied a hundred times that day. No later assurance of the probable stupidity of those people and the flatness of their

activity can ever console me for the things I did not learn. Why did that man hurry into that building? And what were the storified ladies talking about? I still want to know.

But there was no answer to such questions. I was as much outside of things as I was on the prairie at home. I think I was glad when we were taken back to the gloomy, ugly station; and doubly glad when the train carried us away across the jolty, clanking, smoky railroad yards, and we finally left the city behind. We left Uncle Henry and Arthur, too, for they were going on east. Arthur's last words were, "But you just ought to see the New York Central!"

Some time after midnight the conductor put us off the train at our own little station, hardly discernible in the dark—and so back along the roads, to find Felicia Hemans welcoming us and daylight in one raucous hurrah, and Maldy getting ready the earliest breakfast we had ever known.

That second ride in the dark, with the faint color of dawn finally growing out of the gloom, appeared to drop a curtain over the day's ex-

perience and shut it off into a space of its own. It seemed to be a thing that was completed for all time, with nothing following it. I meditated on the contradiction of things; for lo, I seemed, as we rode across the prairie, to be coming back to the book universe, instead of turning my face away from it. One could see more in the city, but one could imagine more in the country. The city did not epitomize books, as I had thought it would—only newspapers and trade catalogs and advertisements, and other things that were really a waste of the noble art of print. I was no nearer my desired verse-world and story-world than I had been before. But somehow that ride helped to reestablish my faith in it. Even the sweet darkness of the prairie and the soft pink line of dawn gave an assurance of its reality, for that very dimness had a mystery and a presence that belonged to nothing I had seen that day. For the first time I found in me some love of the prairie.

## MY BOOK AND HEART

ON the prairie one had time to read. I heard Arthur's mother say that there was so little time for children to read when they were going to school, and I wondered. I didn't see how there could be such a thing as not having time to read. You don't think about taking time to read—you just read. We thought of time only when we were hurrying through one book to get to another; for there was almost always another waiting and holding out a fascinating promise which hastened our progress toward it. And then it was so quiet on the prairie. The general whooping of life was so far away that it did not call us from books with the insistence of its noise. Its activity became history or romance before it reached us.

Arthur's mother said, too, that the days were so much longer at the Plantation than in town; and that also made me wonder. But, of course, it would account for Arthur's not having time

to read. I was not strong on science, and I pictured the sun as rising at school time in the city and setting just as Arthur got home again. Certainly Arthur had not read anything except a few children's stories which we had left behind long since. We sometimes wondered that his parents were not ashamed of him. We tried him in every department of literature, and found him wanting everywhere. To him a poem was a piece to speak, and prose was something one found in the Fourth Reader. If he had not kept us in place by his superior knowledge of the world, we might have become priggish and pharisaic over his limitations.

But of course there was no reason why anyone should feel lofty over simple and natural indulgence in reading. The only wonder, if there was one, was that any person could exercise such self-restraint as Arthur did. As for us, there were the books and there were the long summer days and the long winter evenings. Why not read and read again?

There were the books, to be sure. And by good fortune they were such as led us into the ways of literature. Of all libraries the most

satisfying and the most lovable is not that obtained out of hand by one man in one period, but that which is made up of the accretions of years and even of generations. A real library can hardly be got by any man in one life; it takes the successive tastes of grandfather and father and son, with perhaps the happy inheritance of books chosen by collateral members of the family. Such a library is full of surprises and by-paths, and even of suggestive gaps that stimulate desire.

I suppose I say so because that is the kind of library the Plantation held. It was not a very large collection; freighting books from the East in those days was too expensive. A book had to show reason why its passage should be paid. But, carefully limited as it was, such a library was not merely a library; it was a family tree mentalized, a racial epitome, a record of ancestral mind and taste. Grandfather and even great-grandfather had chosen and worn the books, great-uncles and dead-and-gone cousins had thumbed and ruffled the leaves, tributary and confluent family lines had made contributions. Angular writing of genera-

tions before ours appeared on fly-leaves and margins, along with the glossy labels of far-away book-sellers. Some of the children who visited us, like Arthur, did not think our library looked attractive. The sober shelves had a look of brown, middle-aged respectability, very different from the enticing variegation of a shelf of new novels in their parti-colored dress, or so-called children's books, garish affronts to childish intelligence. Another advantage of living on the prairie is that new books do not wander in every day, and that there is no public library. One has time to read a good book twice.

The foundation of our library was laid by the austere taste of a New England great-grandfather and his evidently like-minded son; the taste of a people who did not care for any nonsense. It is hard to believe that there ever was a time when people really read Cotton Mather and Roger Williams and *Histories of Redemption* and *Four-fold States*, especially grown persons who could read what they liked. Even *Charlotte Temple*, doubtless a concession to frivolity on my grandfather's part, seemed

to us to show a very rudimentary sense of what was entertaining. An inheritance from a Covenanter ancestor\* lent moral support and sympathy to the New Englander's literary taste. From him came the various *Lives* of Cameronians and of Covenanters generally, the treasured copy of the Covenant, numerous Confessions of Faith, copiously and devotedly annotated, a rich collection of sermons and letters, histories of all stages of Presbyterianism—between which and Royalist Scott we became hopelessly bewildered—and dear yellow old collections of Scotch poetry. He must have been a man worth knowing, that ancestor, with his love of songs and of sermons—his *Tales of the Borders* and his tattered *Kilmeny* and well-worn Rutherford's *Letters*.

Then from some romantic feminine source—a great-aunt, I think—came volumes of early Victorian verse, with faint sentimental pencil lines on the margins, and an occasional “Sweet!” or “True!” in a genteel hand. From her, too, must have come the *Ladies' Book of Anecdotes* and certain best-sellers of another time, now long past their day, like dried-up and



passè toasts, such as *Children of the Abbey* and *Alonzo and Melissa*. We didn't have to open these books to know whose name we should find daintily set on the fly-leaf. They were small usually, with faded colored bindings and gold stamping. Lady hands had held them and slender pencils had marked them, and they had come to us unsmudged and unthumbed. There was no likeness between them and the plain, shaky brown books of the Puritan or the Covenanter.

Other books had wandered to us through other by-paths. There was a little group, only a shelfful, which always stood by itself, the scanty mental food of a young uncle—or was it a cousin? Whoever he was, he was not much talked of now, and we had a general impression that he had been a sort of ne'er-do-well, if such a sober person as an uncle could be a ne'er-do-well. But, anyway, he had been a dilettante youth who had passed away before he reached the period of settled-down taste, and had left, to fix his reputation forever, such signs of his judgment as N. P. Willis and Fanny Fern, and several highly colored Annuals, and novels

whose once up-to-date flippancy was now an out-of-date flatness. Poor uncle or whoever he was! Beside his Puritan ancestor's collection his looked garish indeed, and he never could return to correct the impression he continued to make by his youthful following of fashion in reading. The shelf might have furnished a suggestive object lesson to the thoughtful grown-up, and made him wonder how his own library would look to the critic of a generation later, and whether it would be worth handing down to his heirs.

Very different from these was the sweet maiden collection which my mother had brought with her to her new home and which still stood in her room, *The Flower of the Family* and *A Garland of Verse*, and Mrs. Hemans and Jean Ingelow and à Kempis and the *Christian Year* and the *Golden Treasury*, and others. When, with chastened mind, I was spending an afternoon in retreat, I went to her room and read those books.

And then, of course, there were my father's own volumes, gathered through all his years; books thoughtfully collected and soberly

hoarded, as by a man who thought a good book a precious thing. There were few among them that had not won their way to place, and none—save the few forbidden ones—that could not safely be ours. A man with half a dozen young readers coming on does not choose his books lightly.

All these, and others that I cannot account for now, were our range. There were not many among them all that we did not investigate, first and last. We smiled, in more sophisticated years, to think that there had been a time when we judged a book by a merely superficial standard, such as the attractiveness of its title or the amount of dialog it contained. But the introductory mistake we made as to the probable relative value of the solid paragraphs of *Robinson Crusoe* and the promising pages of conversation in *Sandford and Merton* or the *Rollo Books*, for instance, taught us a salutary lesson.

The fact is, we found, it is unwise to pass by any book without a thorough investigation. I shuddered later to think that I had made three separate attempts to read *Ivanhoe* before I

could get past its initial lesson in linguistics and politics. And what if I had not made a fourth effort—with certain saltatory movements that took me past this barrier! For a long time we ignored the golden *History of Granada*, supposing it to be an ordinary history, and the luscious *Life of John Martin*, bound in dull brown with plain lettering, which we had passed over as mere biography. Such mistakes as these made us wary. Diamonds might lurk anywhere. It behooved us to be up and looking.

And look we did. I doubt if there was at last a single dramatic element left undiscovered in all our small library. The old books were of two classes generally: books whose soft yellow pages with their frayed edges fell open of themselves, showing cleavage most notably at places which we at once knew must be the best; and books with starchy, unhandled leaves and creaking, protesting backs; books which had kept an unbroken newness through all the generations that had owned them.

There was something pathetic, I thought at first, about an unread book, standing on a shelf

in endless waiting, and offering its unused meaning year after year to unasking owners. I used to take one down occasionally and make an attempt to read it—like Sordello with his pitiful caryatides. But I generally found that there had been reason for its rejection by my predecessors. The ancestral literary taste was not to be despised, I found, as the result of my investigations, and I readily returned the stiff lines of *The Pleasures of the Imagination* and the moralities of Martin Tupper to their accustomed repose. But there continued to be for me a wistful look about even the back of a neglected book.

On the other hand, if a book were ragged and wobbly in its covers, that was reason enough for examining it. It had evidently been popular and could probably show cause. It was so we found *Pilgrim's Progress*, a mere tatter of a book, and we never had reason to regret the time we spent on it. Until we were absolutely sure that a book was essays or science or theology or a footless stuff called philosophy, we gave it a fair chance. Even diaries and biographies, for the judicious and persevering skip-

per, have dramatic moments. All books, in our judgment, were to be tasted.

Of course there were Dickens and Scott and Mrs. Whitney and beloved Miss Alcott. But reading them was like getting money out of a bank. The true searcher for gold finds it in the rough and in unassured places. There was real excitement in turning the pious leaves of the unpromising *Life of James Renwick*, with expectation of entertainment low, and then suddenly finding him escaping across the moss-hags, his horse guided by a Power that evidently approved of his views on church polity, while the prelatical Claverhouse men in pursuit floundered up to their shoulders and gave up the chase. Such a finding as that stimulated us to make acquaintance with other Covenanters, men who lived a life of daring and risk and escape—or dramatic martyrdom—that put them in a class with Robinson Crusoe himself.

Even in the dun-colored old *History of the Covenanters* there would suddenly appear, set in between dull acts of Parliament and unexciting politics, a secret conventicle in the mist and the heather, where the excitement of

hazard run must have compensated for the solemnity of paraphrase and sermon. And then would come in those Claverhouse men again, and the Presbyterians would drop to cover in the heather or bracken, except the few who were always taken and led away to the boot or the maiden—instruments we tried in vain to visualize or invent.

Patches like this would enliven any history. We could not help regarding them as accidents in historical narrative, which left to itself would cling by nature to the dullness of acts of Parliament and the monotonous performance of Whig and Tory. But, accident or not, such bits were too delightful for us to chance missing them, and led us to the examination of other histories in the hope that they, too, were enlivened with dramatic episodes.

Nor were we unrewarded. The divorce trial of Katherine of Arragon and the simple elemental Henry neatly disposing of wife after wife; Luther meeting the devils on the roofs of Worms—so our confused imaginations syn-copated the affair; the adorable Mary, irresistible we didn't know why, Mary with her

Rizzio and her Bothwell and her eternal way with her; Anne Boleyn with her royal lover, and her two small hands clasping her own slender neck; Catherine Douglas sacrificing her white arm for a bolt to the rude door to save the kingly James; the good-looking Charles stepping out through the wall to have his handsome head cut off—episodes like these enriched the sparsely set pages of history and made the moments when we were bidden to read it quite tolerable.

In fact, except the negligible classes I have named, there is scarcely any book that does not have something interesting in it. The whole art of being entertained lies in two things—in being a good skipper and in seeing things as they are. There is *Pilgrim's Progress*, for instance. However it may be for the pious or literary grown-up, there is no book that more invites skipping on the part of the discriminating ten-year-old. The long array of Golden Texts and dialogued religion seems made to be skipped. But ah me, the Delectable Mountains and the House Beautiful—do you have such a rested feeling anywhere else in litera-



ture?—and the country of Beulah and the Valley of the Shadow of Death! Everything in the book could be seen as plain as day. Prudence and Piety and Charity looked like some pretty maids I had seen once at a hotel, and Mercy looked like the mild young wife of our doctor, and Christian looked like just any man. They were all such genuine flesh-and-blood that I could have pinched them. But that was no credit to either Bunyan or us. When you are ten things easily turn into flesh and blood. It doesn't matter much whether books are illustrated or not. After you have shut them up once you can hardly remember whether the pictures were on the page or in your head.

Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, however, was illustrated. I don't suppose it would ever occur to any wise person selecting five hundred books or five yards of books or five hundred pounds of books for the juvenile, to include that gory chronicle among them. I am sure there is no warrant in pedagogical principles for supposing that any normal child could be induced to read it. But we did, and more than once—whether on advice or not, I don't remember.

What pleasure any youngster could find in that long panorama of flayings and fagots and rackings and blood and stern refusals to recant, I cannot surmise now. But we were so well acquainted with it that the martyr became for us a distinct type of person, like the gypsy or mover or robber, the sort of person whose function it was to have his head cut off bloodily or to be hung on a pole upside down.

As I say, the book was illustrated, with an innocent art that spared no detail and an incongruity of martyrly expression that modified the horror even for us. The chubby bishop of Arethusa, seated aloft on a clothes basket, suggestive of the peaceful arts connected with the family washing, and gazing in round-eyed and bewildered perturbation at an approaching flock of something, whether bees or buzzards, I don't know; a thickly-whiskered but knock-kneed persecutor neatly removing Francis Gross's muscular tissue with an implement which looked like a milk-skimmer; one of the seventy martyrs coyly dropping a corner of her round chin on the blade of the broad corn-knife that was cutting her head off; that was the sort of picture

which illuminated religious fervor for us. I suppose we found a novel as well as a dramatic element in the suffering—a thing which lay entirely outside of our experience; and enjoyed at the same time the opportunity for indignation against the persecutors—a large, righteous sort of feeling. Anyway, we fell back on that book on many Sunday afternoons when public opinion appeared to demand that we read something appropriate to the season. It seemed to be a religious work.

There is nothing in our later explorations among books that is comparable to the delight of these early searchings. The more undirected they were the better. Of course when *They*, who were supposed to know everything, gave us a book and bade us become acquainted with it we assumed that it must possess some well-established merit, and set ourselves to find it. Sometimes we found it and sometimes we did not. There was *Sandford and Merton*, which profited by its enthusiastic introduction to us. I don't remember that any reason was offered for inflicting that book upon us, except that it contained useful information

—no reason at all—and that our grandfather Johnson had had to read it when he was a boy. I leave it to any lover of real entertainment if either of these reasons was sufficient. I don't see how my grandfather's generation grew up with the incubus of that book upon them. It is a poor book that can't be read more than once. But I really thought that I should rather forget how to read than follow a second time the misadventures of the dull Tommy or the noble example of the paragonic Harry.

Afterward I read somewhere the life of this informational Mr. Day, and how he educated a girl to be his wife—by such means as those of the book, no doubt—and when she was all properly educated and ready she would not wear the clothes he prescribed and so would not do, and how three other young ladies in succession refused him, and I was glad of it. I wished forty young ladies had refused him and he had died of cumulative broken heart.

That was the kind of book that might be imposed on us when officious elders selected our reading. In spite of the generally accepted view of *Their* omniscience, I sometimes sus-

pected them of offering us books which they had not read themselves, and never would read. *Sandford and Merton* seemed enough evidence of that. But generally such direction as we got was largely negative. There were certain books which we might not read—openly—but it was generally assumed that when we were reading we were safe. So we were left to the long joys of discovery of literature, joys that were incomparable and manifold.

There is no other delight like that of finding something fine for yourself where no one has pointed it out to you. You may be fairly sure that in time all the substantial and sensible merits of literature will be shown you more or less forcibly, and that you will have an opportunity to test them for yourself. But there may be a thousand shy or remote things that no one will ever tell you about. That is why it is wise to search widely and unflaggingly. One gets to have a sweet proprietary interest in bits of literature discovered for one's self. Sometimes the treasures are so rare that one does not tell anyone else about them at all. For me, I had a secret hoard of beauties that I did

not discover even to John or Mary—Henry was quite out of the question, of course. In time these were taken from me by the annoying discovery that no end of people knew them already, that they had even been vulgarized by common quoting.

One day, in prowling through an unpromising old gray book I found “a green thought in a green shade.” That *was* a moment! I lived on the phrase for a day and returned to it for weeks afterward for sweet, æsthetic sips. When I lay on the grass under the box-elder tree and looked up through its rather scanty leaves, I used to say it over to myself and wait for an appropriate thought—which never came. For years I thought it was my verse and only mine. Who else would think of looking into an old gray book for it? To that I added from time to time such sister joys as “with the moon’s beauty and the moon’s soft pace.” That was a good bit to say to myself when I leaned from the window at night, after saying my prayers, to take a last look at the sky and postpone for a stolen instant the moment of final retirement.

I found that in a book of extracts. Books of extracts and quotations—the difference is that an extract is longer than a quotation—are excellent good things for the discoverer of literature. If you are taken with the sample you can hunt up the whole fabric and find many joys in that way. They are great books for tasting. So it was that I first discovered *Lalla Rookh* and the *Songs of Seven*. And while I was tracing the samples to their sources I might come upon other delights by the way that nothing had pointed me to. The excitement and happiness of exploration were endless. To Columbus the tinsel joy of discovering America—my own discoveries for me! That thousands had already made them for themselves did not matter. And yet I did not show John and Mary everything I found.

The corner of the Forbidden Books added a zest and a perilous excitement to our explorations. The grown-ups certainly had curious notions about what it was inadvisable for children to read. I read a good many of the Forbidden Books, almost all of them, in fact, and found nothing bad in them. Some of them I

found merely dull and returned them unfinished. I tasted Balzac, for instance, but didn't like the taste. Of course in later years, with the tremendous knowledge gained by grown-upness, I should probably have coincided with *Their* view, but you have to know a good deal about badness in order to recognize it when you see it. If you are only young enough, you can read almost anything, skimming lightly and safely over unguessed depths of wickedness. It really was Ellen and the elders whose reading should have been restricted.

But having books forbidden makes them irresistibly alluring, and adds the excitement of hazard to the reading of them. Did you never sneak a book away to read it, prudently sliding up the other books on the shelf so that no betraying gap might show? Did you never, for instance, read *Romola* under the bed in the spare bedroom, dividing your righteous condemnation of Tito with your own conscientious scruples, and your fear for Romola's safety with shivers lest you yourself be caught? Did you never make your way through *Vanity Fair* by cautious half-hour snatches, fearful every



moment lest some one in authority should interrupt?

There was one horrible day when I sought the tranquil though badly-lighted seclusion under the spare bed, forgetting that one of the frequent visiting preachers was sojourning with us. I had reached the third chapter of *Children of the Abbey*, thousands of miles away from bed springs and figured carpet, when the preacher entered. I had forgotten his existence. But there he was and there he stayed. He read and he wrote; he even practiced a sermon—not much of a sermon, I thought. And all the while I, rolled to the very limits of my retreat, waited for him to go. What if he should, like another minister who once stayed with us, do without supper! That was one of the things I was afraid of. The other was that he might pray. We wondered a good deal what the ministers did when they stayed in their rooms so much, and had decided that they spent the most of their time in vocalized devotion. At least that is what the preachers in the *Lives* did. We had even paused outside the door sometimes when no

scrupulous elder was in sight, to listen for suggestive sounds from within. But it would have been one thing to hear him from outside and quite another to be shut in the room with him. I simply could not stand it if he prayed. It would be unthinkably embarrassing. And besides, his position of devotion might be an unfavorable one for me.

But this preacher was apparently not of the praying kind. At least he did not use this opportunity, but finally went off to the orchard to look for Red Junes, and I escaped. The only lesson I drew from that episode was not to frequent the spare room when we had company. I finished *Children of the Abbey* in the wheat bin and got it back to the house undiscovered.

It never occurred to us at that time that literary quality had anything to do with the limitations laid on our reading. I was much puzzled during my surreptitious perusal of *Fair Women* to account for the prejudice that existed against it among the censors of our reading. We supposed that a book was forbidden on purely moral grounds, and were surprised

and disappointed when we found no palpable wickedness in it. We always hoped to find in one of them some time an unrestricted view of villainy such as would entirely satisfy our hungry imaginations. We craved a novelty in rascality that would really startle us, but never found it. I don't know how old you are when you begin to discover Canons of Taste, or whether you discover them yourself or have them laid on you, like social conventions. But there is a pleasant time before you are aware of them and are still untrammelled and unashamed in all your verdicts. Then *John Gilpin* is not funny, and *We Are Seven* is, and *The Ancient Mariner* is a nice, spooky, fairy tale, and *Pilgrim's Progress* is in the same class with *Arabian Nights*, and *Little Women* is about the best book ever written. An interesting book is an interesting book in whatever company you find it.

There is nothing that furnishes greater promise of continued satisfaction in life than to know that whatever happens you can always read. However other interests may fluctuate or fail, there are always books, and there is al-

ways an interesting one if you only search long enough for it. It gives a sort of certainty to life, and an assurance of its continued likableness, to know that there need be no dull interstices in it. Games may flag, and brothers and sisters may have moments of slightly damaged amiability, but entertainment need not pause while there are still books to read. If there are no new ones you can always read *David Copperfield* again.

The shaky old books were none the less shaky when we were through with them, especially if we had forgotten them in the orchard or the cottonwood grove for a few days at a time. But the orchard was a good place in summer, I found. I found, too, that it was a good thing to disappear into it early in the afternoon before anyone had thought to say where was that child, and it really was time she was learning to sew or crochet or something. I don't know why it doesn't tire your elbows or your back when you are ten to lie on the grass with a book in front of you for a whole afternoon. After you have passed an-

other decade or two you don't care much for the position.

Those orchard afternoons! When I established a pile of apples beside me and turned the first leaf of my book the sun was high above me. Then a minute or two passed, and some one was calling me, and the sun was almost down, and the apples were all gone. That was the only thing that surprised me, however. I had been in a far country and the lapse of time was only natural.

## THE VANITY OF ROMANCE

ON the whole I thought I did not care for a husband. It seemed a more desirable thing, even at a distant view, to leave the chances of life open. There was a finality about a husband that seemed to do away with other possibilities and define unalterably the road of the future.

And that road of the future—what a way it was! No one could tell yet where it might go, or what might happen on it. Sometimes I could hardly wait to see, and sometimes I was glad to wait and breathlessly push it farther from me while I wondered and wondered, and planned and planned. But the trouble is one cannot read about any kind of experience without wanting to try it. Everything in the world seems worth doing, for a while at least. That makes it a most irksome limitation to be only one person. Had I been five, four others and myself, we could amongst us have compassed

everything worth while. But to be only one person, hampered by sex conventions besides—it is a pitifully meager fate. That is why I early decided against matrimony as a career. It didn't seem to offer either excitement or celebrity, and at the same time it seemed to close the doors to all other experiences. I considered the matter once and settled it. Who had ever heard of a person celebrated as a successful *wife*? Nor could a married person be a heroine; in my reading, at least, there was no precedent for it. That is the same as saying that my stories were not very modern. So far as I knew, married people just lived and kept house—the last thing in the world to do.

But, this point settled, the choice of all the world lay before me. Daily I dreamed; I called it making up stories. At night after I went to bed, in long afternoons in the orchard, behind my geography at school, I composed my never-ending tales. In them I walked a path of splendor. Romance marked my way. For they were always about the great things the future was to bring me. It is a rich time, before your fancy is hampered by any knowledge

of practical conditions or probabilities, and is guided by desire and that alone. Sometimes I was to be a poet, sometimes a novelist or singer or scholar, sometimes rich, and beautiful beyond even Tennyson's telling, sometimes a heroine with fine deeds to my credit, anon a mere philanthropist, modestly earning untold gratitude—but always I was to be great and celebrated, somehow, somewhere. The fact that I was unmusical, unpoetical, unscholarly, unbeautiful, and unclever, was a matter of present grief, but it in no wise curbed my imagination. I was to be different in the future. For each career chosen I elaborately planned out every item with a care and precision worthy of a novelist. Little Ellie herself could not outdo me in faithful detail—only I put in no lover as yet, and I could see no point in Ellie and her foolish swan's nest.

The constant element in all these variables was success, glorified success, the admiration of all observers, and the astonishment and humble approval of my family. They were the ones it seemed most worth while to impress. To be sure, there were scattered seasons when family



authority or lack of appreciation irked me, and I decided to get even by being merely a humble, devoted, dutiful soul, whose merit was discovered when it was too late, to the poignant regret of her unappreciative friends. I dwelt more on the poignant regret than on the devotion and duty.

The too-open respectability of our family record seemed to preclude mystery or romance, and at times drove me to the luscious fancy that I was adopted! Some one—the Queen of England preferably—might come up our drive almost any day to claim me and take me away to my true sphere. I would be very gracious and really affectionate in taking leave of my humble foster-family, and send them a thousand dollars by return mail. Of course, when the next day I had decided to become a novelist and make a large fortune by my own absolutely unaided efforts, I was rather glad that the Queen had not come for me. But for the moment whatever dream lay in my small mind was as real as reality, and I went to bed nightly wondering when things were going to begin to happen. Sometimes they seemed unbearably slow.

There was one great day in my mental history. Up to that time I had thought quiet and some degree of solitude necessary for the carrying on of my stories. I could do it at school when I ought to be studying, but the chance was better on the road to and from school when I lagged behind the other children, or out in the orchard under the Red June tree, or on the long drives with the grown-ups, when they talked away and paid no attention to me. The best time was after I was in bed and Maddy had taken the light away and told me to go straight to sleep. To go to sleep was rank waste; sleeping was the last thing to consider doing unless one were sure of dreaming. But sleep-dreams were very unsatisfactory, because one forgot them or they broke off at the wrong point, or failed of probability, even to my mind. What I did was to turn my face to the window, where a maple tree made a lattice for the stars to shine through, snuggle down and begin on my story where I had left off last—unless some reading or happening of the day had set me on a new trail.

But on the Great Day I learned something.

In our well-disciplined Calvinistic family the working theory was that duty was the moral bread of life, and that no child was too small to have duties in proportion and to be required to do them. It was a most irksome theory. The Stern Lawgiver stalked unwelcome among us younglings and hampered us at undesired moments. But for me, I wore her shackles lightly after this important day when, called at a most exciting moment of a story to finish some shirked towel-hemming, I found that I could carry on my absorbing fiction while my reluctant hands were toiling prosaically. What did it matter if my hands held a dish-towel and my needle was sticky, and if my thread knotted and became embarrassingly grimy? My real me was far away, doing tremendous things. No wonder it was a great day. From that time on, neither the presence of people nor occupation to which I should have given my mind, hindered me from weaving my airy fabric of the things to be desired. The moment current affairs ceased to be interesting, I was off on the path of experiences I hoped would come to pass.

The effect of this on my practical education

was disastrous. No future heroine ever brought on herself more present obloquy and reprimand. How can one remember what she has been sent to the cellar for, when she is enjoying a vision of herself receiving the plaudits and flowers of thousands on the opera stage? How can she remember which are young pansy plants and which are weeds, when she is planning what she would do if she found a robber in her room at night? How can she take care to make little stitches and keep the right distance from the edge and not pucker, when she is at the very critical moment of saving a train, like Kate Shelley, about whom poems had been written in the newspapers?

In such a scheme of life virtue was less a thing to be yearned for than was fame. Anyone could be good, or at least one could be good when one could not be anything else. Still, I was not sure that I ought to fabricate my stories on Sunday; it seemed too worldly an amusement, although the long church service did furnish an enticing opportunity. Then I thought of a way; I would make the story fit the occasion. So on Sundays, in the meager-

looking, white-plastered little prairie church, while the dim old minister was preaching away into his whiskers, I saw myself as a missionary in heathen lands, as the pious subject of a little Sunday-school book, as a faithful little mother to my orphaned brothers and sisters. That idea would have interested John and Mary. Well, it is something to covet goodness even on Sundays. Sometimes the impulse comes less often than once a week.

Then I wanted a companion in this absorbing life, or else I wanted to show off my inventive ability, I don't know which. Anyway, I tried to induct little Mary into my own joys. But Mary did not prove worthy. She wanted everything accounted for on a practical basis. She was so unimaginative as to ask where the old gentleman was coming from who was going to leave me a million dollars, or where were the signs of the artistic talent by which I was to leap to sudden fame. No one could confide an ambition to such incredulous ears. I gave her up.

Then I tried Henry in one of his more pliant moods. There was no questioning his imagi-

nation. He followed me promptly, he suggested new details, we found a place for him in the scheme and moved hand in hand to fame; the structure grew nobly. But alas for the rarity of masculine faithfulness under the sun! That very night, with the story warm in our minds, Henry crassly, insensately referred to it before the whole family. And then, when idly questioned, he, as if insensible to the delicate exotic quality of the thing he was handling and the intimate nature of the revelation, told it, jocularly crediting the whole thing to me. No conduct could have been baser, more uncomradelike. To this hour I hope he will be punished for it. Could I have passed away at that moment, with all those surreptitiously smiling ones about me, I should willingly have foregone all the coming true of all the dreams. But it taught me a bitter lesson. There is a point beyond which no man can go. You may trust your friends with your money or your past, but with your ambitions and your dreams, no one.

After that, like the pampered soul in the *Palace of Art*, I held my solemn mirth alone. Like the same soul, I sucked dry the orange of

experience. I sampled all phases of life that looked interesting, from being cast away on a desert island, where I out-crused Crusoe in prodigies of timely ingenuity, to conducting a temperance campaign and convincing besotted but reasonable thousands that they should hate the bowl. There were no unhappy limits to possibility. I never had to look wistfully over the confining fence at an experience that I had blindly failed to choose. If any experience looked desirable I promptly appropriated it, at least until I had worn the details of it trite. Then I easily changed to another. No wonder I hesitated to limit my roving fancy to any such fixed condition as matrimony.

As for the trifling factor that preceded or brought about the married state, that, or he, was quite negligible. No lover rode across the mirror of my inventions. That was the one thing that belonged strictly to a book, though everything else was transferable. I had not seen one in real life, nor yet conceived of one outside of print. Indeed I had not paid much attention to that element, even in fiction. Pure love-stories were carefully excluded from our

reading, so far as might be, and romantic affection I had found a rather vague feature in the stories I had read. I was used, of course, to having heroes and heroines want to get married, just as they wanted money or an inheritance, or the punishment of their enemies. There were only two objects in a story, so far as I had observed. One was that the hero should get what he wanted, whatever that might be; and the other that the villain should be adequately and satisfactorily punished. If the hero wanted to get married—as I summed up the yearnings of the lover's passion—why, let him. I could follow the story of his impassioned strivings with faithful sympathy, since it was all in the story; though why *Ivanhoe*, for example, was possessed with a desire to settle down uneventfully with Rowena, when he could have gone on and had further exciting adventures, I really couldn't see. But the concrete reward of love seemed to be as definite an objective point as taking a castle or fighting in a tournament, and I was for success for the right man, whatever he might want.

We had tried, it is true, to work this element



into the inventions of our endless games, but without much success. Mary was quite too small and too practical to take the rôle of heroine, and I was too unadaptable. I always insisted on the same form of proposal: "Will you be mine?" Henry and John acknowledged that to be an orthodox form, but they thought something should be left to individual taste and personality. So the game always broke up at this point, and we entered on housekeeping relations in the playhouse without benefit of clergy.

Our vagueness on the subject of the divine passion was only natural, after all. Scott is no instructor in such a matter, and even Dickens lacks definition. He scants his love-scenes shamefully, anyone will acknowledge. Practical sources of romantic information were few. We had never seen a wedding. Wedding-cards came from the East sometimes, and we handled them curiously, as the sign of something very remote, both in circumstance and in idea. But the actual committing of matrimony lay outside of our knowledge. We regarded it as the thing that happened in a story after all the

real excitement was over and there was nothing more to expect. If we could have seen a live pair of lovers in actual operation, that department of life might have been illuminated for us. But all the grown-up people we knew were already sorted out into married couples, and ordinary married couples bore little trace now of past romantic excitement in their accomplishment of matrimony. They might have been born married, so far as we could tell. Our father and mother, for instance—they seemed distinctly fond of each other, and yet we couldn't conceive of a time when they didn't have us. And we certainly would have been an impediment to courtship. Such was the status of romance with me until a certain June afternoon that marked a new emotional epoch.

I had just finished the Legree section of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the third time. The last comfortable shiver had died away up my spine, and still lying under the box-elder tree, with my elbows in the grass and my chin in my hands, I was wondering what to do next. It was then that I happened to see Ellen.

There are vivid moments in one's acquaint-

ance with people, even with members of one's own family, when their characters are suddenly illuminated with new light. So, as I say, I saw Ellen. I dropped my idly waving toes in the grass and sat up, to bring my mind to an earnest contemplation of something I had never seen in her before. Ellen was my oldest sister. For two years she had been back East in boarding school, and she had now returned, a young lady, and I was adjusting myself to her as a new element in the family. At this moment she sat on the side of the hammock, and a Young Man stood in front of her. Young Men, I had begun to notice, had become rather frequent occurrences at our house of late, and they always fell to Ellen to entertain. As I idly watched them I became aware of the thing that made me sit up.

To begin with, it broke upon me for the first time that Ellen was pretty. Even to the unprepossessed eye of a younger sister that was now apparent. It had never occurred to me before, for a very simple and logical reason. There had been nothing in my reading to suggest that beauty was anything less than an absolute qual-

ity. A young lady was absolutely beautiful and fit to figure in a novel, like Rowena and Rebecca, or she was not beautiful and no heroine at all. Now it dawned on me that there were degrees of beauty and that Ellen had one of them, if not more.

This afternoon she wore a pretty pink dress, one that had come from the East with her, and had an airiness and ruffiness unknown to my useful frocks. She sat with her knees crossed—I was not allowed to do that—and the attitude brought the tip of a shiny slipper into view, especially when she gave a little push to set the hammock in motion. Her chin was tilted a bit sidewise. Anon she looked up at the young man and then dropped her eyelashes and looked at the rosette on her slipper, and gave a little kick—at least if I had done it it would have been a kick, if ever so little—that set her ruffles fluttering. When the wind blew her fluffy hair about her face she let it stay for a moment and then put it back, not too securely, with an airy motion that brought her bare elbow into view for a slow minute. No wonder I looked at her. When she combed my

hair in the morning, a process entered upon with reluctance on both sides, she didn't tip her chin or flutter her eyelashes or look up with a sudden half-smile. A truth abruptly took my breath away: *Ellen was coquetting*.

I had not dreamed of such a literary possibility as this within my own family. I slowly pushed myself backward until I reached the box-elder for support, and contemplatively gathered up my knees under my chin. At a bound Ellen had passed from being a mere member of the family, with a big sister's unwarranted assumption of authority and troublesome notions as to my deportment, to the dignity of a young lady, and one who could make a young man look like *that*. My gaze wandered to the veranda where my father and mother were sitting. Their attitude and manner indicated distinctly amicable relations, but they certainly differed from those of Ellen and the young man. It slowly came to me that possibly there was something very enjoyable in this situation of Ellen's. Maybe there was more in the whole matter than I had supposed.

Presently, as no new phenomena seemed to

promise at the hammock, I arose and walked meditatively to the house. I slipped into Ellen's room, she being safely engaged for the moment, and looked at myself in her glass, the glass of young-ladyhood. I didn't need its evidence to tell me that I was not beautiful, but what I was looking for was not actuality but promise. With the aid of Ellen's grown-up hairpins I secured my hair on the top of my head—my poor, straight, slippery hair that lost so many hair-ribbons. The result certainly was an improvement. Ellen's perfectly beautiful summer hat, all drooping and pink and flowery, lay on the bed. I put it on. Then I looked about me, and a drawer partly open beckoned. Vanity lay within it, in the shape of a lacy, fluffy boa-thing, which I promptly clapped about my undeniably skinny neck. Then I looked in the glass again, with optimistic eye and hopeful forecast of the years. Even I, unbiased though generously sympathetic, thought I saw a far-away promise. Perhaps when I was a young lady!—who could tell?

That night I introduced an entirely novel element into my story: a—lover. I wish I could

write it in small type. He was a very nebulous creation at first, and even my own attitude and action wanted definition. The whole relation was tentative, awaiting fuller information. And that information was not so easy to come by as one might suppose. I kept a careful eye on Ellen. But Ellen never seemed to go beyond the most elementary conduct. She didn't do anything but look sidewise and upwise and downwise and say little saucy things that left a heavy burden of response on the young men. I cast about for further illustrations, but no one in sight was in a position to furnish them. I wanted a real love scene, rich in detail and lavish in phrase.

I fell back on novels, where one ought to be able to learn anything about life. But it was surprising how they had slighted the love scenes. Jane Austen was so modest in her shy syncopating of them; and Scott never seemed to have time for them, because he had to hurry off to start another fight; and Thackeray gave only little samples, expecting you to know the rest; and *Jane Eyre* was too intellectual for me. As for the mild juvenile books

given us by relatives, they confined themselves to didactic issues, with a bare hint of future romance thrown in at the end as a sort of apology for previous dullness. Our reading was entirely too well guarded. Why had no one introduced us to the current Chambers or Hitchens of the time, whoever he was? Family discipline, even personal honor, will not stand everything. I looked at the shelves of the Forbidden Books once too often, and then I fell. The Forbidden Books make a whole chapter, which cannot be given here. They proved my tree of good and evil—and indifferent. But I learned why they were forbidden and I learned other things. Chiefly I learned what I wanted to know.

So far as may lie in the ten-year-old I applied it. The romance throve apace. I soon passed Ellen, wondering why she contented herself with her pointless, incipient affairs when she might have a real, full-flavored one. Mere amusement was a slight object. I sighed for dramatic results. Never had the resources about me seemed so limited.

But at last arrived the real chance, the op-



portunity of the seeker of romance. There came out of the East a young lady cousin to visit, and then presently a young man she was engaged to marry, obligingly invited to spend a few days at the Plantation. To be married was a small thing, but to be engaged—that *was* romantic. I should have preferred to have them just at the point of getting engaged, but this would do. All the small imagination of me sat up to watch. Something crept through the atmosphere of the house, a mingled amusement and sympathy, and an alertness to guard against surprises and awkward situations.

For me, I forgot my own affair in my excitement over this. Think of having a novel brought and put down under your very nose! Ellen faded into unimportance. My own admirer held to a thread of existence, but an attenuated one. When I really found out new details I could revive him. Frequently chidden though I was, politeness was almost beyond possibility. I wanted to stare and strain my ears to listen. Unless under strict orders, I hung always in the near distance, shy but eager. If I could only see them when there was

no one around! There must be interesting moments that were practically lost to the world.

Then, beyond my wildest hopes, a chance came. I was up in the biggest Maiden's Blush tree eating an apple when I saw them coming. I always called them the lovers to myself. I can't tell what an element it put into life to know that at any hour of the day I might walk into one of the everyday rooms of the house, never so hallowed before, and find a pair of lovers. At this moment they were—well, I won't say what they were doing, but at the time I noted it as an item. It was what I had searched for in Miss Austen and failed to find. But that was not all. They came right up to the tree, not like normal people to look for apples, but to sit down in the soft, branchy grass *right* beneath me. There never was a more awkward or more delightful situation. Of course I knew I should go away, but what could I do? I leave it to anyone if I was to blame. There was no moment from the time they came in sight when I could have made my presence known without mortification on both sides. It seemed to be distinctly the part of a lady to

keep still when she was up a tree, and it would embarrass the people below to know that she was there. Anyway, I am not telling, even now, and I should not if I were urged, what they said—still less what they *did*.

But there were drawbacks in the situation. No one need think I was enjoying it in full comfort, in spite of the dramatic intensity of the moment. They came upon me just as I was changing my position in the tree, and the Samothracian Nike herself is not more tired than I was before I had a chance to move. I held my unfinished apple in one hand. I dared not eat it, I had no pocket, and for the moment no lap. With my other hand I had to cling to a crotch above my head. There was room for only one foot in the crotch where I was supporting myself, and of course I could not change.

How would you like to cling with one hand to a branch of an apple tree, while you listened to the platitudes of affection—addressed to some one else? Would it give you any thrills to learn the real evincements of passion, while your right foot was being pinched in a crotch

and your other hung at large, heavy and unsupported, and your thumb was being slowly paralyzed as it clutched the slippery core of an apple? Wouldn't such unfitting circumstances affect anyone's sympathetic appreciation?

Anyway, it was apparent to me now that I had overestimated the literary and dramatic value of such a scene as was going on below me. The language was far below my expectations. I could think of better myself. There was a good deal of repetition of phrasing and what I took for lack of originality. In fact, as my arm began to ache, I thought it all sounded rather silly—the worse the ache, the more foolish the dialogue. I hadn't thought much of "ownest own," even when I found it in *Maud*, and I thought less of it when I heard it said. As for the action—well, I was a little like Jane Austen myself. I looked the other way the most of the time. I shouldn't have cared to be either of them. The whole situation had evidently been distinctly overrated.

They seemed to have been there a week. My arm ached, my thumb was tired, my foot was cramped, my other foot was numb—I almost

wanted to cry. Things below me were getting duller and duller. I was wondering how it would do to get down deliberately and walk away in a dignified manner. Then all at once everything happened. Henry and a bumble-bee precipitated the tragic result.

The bumble-bee nearly destroyed my already doubtful poise by buzzing viciously around my head. Then he lighted on the rapidly browning surface of my apple and remained there in ominous quiet, approaching his fuzzy black-and-yellow self steadily nearer the tip of my thumb. I watched him in awful fear. When he touched my thumb I should scream, I knew. While this horror was pending Henry appeared on the scene at the other end of the vista enclosed by apple-trees. He saw me on my perch, but not the absorbed lovers beneath, and emitted a shrill, brotherly "Hi!" by way of salutation. At the very same moment the bee reached out a scraggly leg for a feeler, secured footing, and deliberately drew himself over on my thumb. I did scream—who could have helped it? Moreover, I flung the apple and slid precipitately and recklessly from the

tree, landing at the very feet of the lovers, who had sprung up at Henry's call. There, a mass of aches and jar and mortification, I remained a moment. They looked at me, I looked at their feet; Henry, a happy outsider, looked at us all. Then I rose and walked away. But you know how your back feels when you are walking away.

If it had not been for Henry the affair would not have mattered, for I know the lovers would not have mentioned it. But Henry, again to the shame of the sex, told. First, he followed me to the house, pestering me all the way with questions and surmises and deridings. I took refuge in *hauteur*. There is nothing else to do when one seems to be in the wrong. If I had gratified Henry's masculine curiosity he would probably have entered into league with me, and there, except for the lasting effects of disillusionment, the matter might have ended. But my haughty silence drove him into virtuous indignation at my breach of hospitality, and for the honor of the family he mentioned the occurrence to *Them*. Then followed a series of mentionings. Everybody mentioned it to me. My

mother mentioned it reluctantly, my father jocularly, a visiting grandparent solemnly, Ellen with spicy indignation. She thought that I ought to apologize, but my mother said no. I don't know where the lovers spent the rest of the afternoon, for no one saw them again until supper-time. I didn't think I wanted any supper, but I was sent for and brought in, with lagging steps and painful shame on my brow. I think the shame was chiefly for a lost ideal, however, for I certainly was in the tree first. But everybody talked about Mark Twain all through the meal.

That night I said a reluctant but irrevocable farewell to the attenuated lover. He was very passionate and woe-begone, and *he* did credit to his kind by using beautiful language. He might have used more, but I went to sleep in the midst of it. The next morning, while weeding the verberna bed, I entered on a new career as a rancher in the far West. I would run a large ranch—with great profit—all alone, and I would have about thirty men, and boss them all myself.

## A GREEN THOUGHT

It all began in a perfectly natural way. Henry and I were first engaged in the quiet and innocuous, though unæsthetic, amusement of seeing how far we could stick our tongues out, and whose tongue, when thus projected, could be brought to the finest point. Henry outclassed me—by virtue of his greater maturity, I chose to think. He *said* he could see this fine tip he had achieved, and he certainly could almost touch his nose with it. I was profoundly chagrined, but I covered my mortification as best I could by using my now well-limbered tongue to imply that this sort of pre-eminence was of a very undesirable quality, anyway, and to draw some rather unpleasant parallels. Henry made a retort involving a personal allusion which had nothing to do with the occasion, but was all the more annoying. Our moment of pleasant emulation seemed



likely to pass into one of acrimonious difference.

But just at this point Henry's eye happened to fall upon the brimming plate of fly-poison which Maldy had placed on a window-sill to beguile the gluttonous fly. In its lake of deadly water floated dark-gray squares of fly-paper, enticingly spread with brown sugar for purposes of allurements, but in reality exuding certain death. At least Maldy cherished the notion that they did. Henry was struck with an idea which for the moment eclipsed disputation.

"I dare you to see how near you can come to that with your tongue without touching it," he said.

Now there were two reasons why I should have met this with either silent reproof or virtuous refusal. We were forbidden always by Maldy to "near ourselves" to her poison plates or to "have any doings" with them. And we were expressly forbidden by the highest authorities either to offer "dares" or to take them. Ever since the day when I had attempted to stand on one foot on the ridge of the granary roof while Henry counted five hun-

dred, and had failed ignominiously and dangerously, "daring" had been under a ban for us. Henry should not have dared me now, and I should not have accepted the challenge. But one who bears daily and hourly the obloquy of not being a boy is especially sensitive on points of honor and courage.

I bent over the plate and experimentally measured the distance. Then I had a second thought.

"You're afraid to do it yourself," I said.

"I'm not, either. You go ahead and do it first."

I was aware of an inconsistency in this, but one can't be all the time pointing out its illogicalities to masculinity, so I said nothing more. I approached a cautious and oscillating tongue to the mixture. Then Henry, remarking that I had not come within a mile of it, did the same. He did seem to outdo me—again because of his larger proportions, I was sure. My blood was up. Henry never forgot it when he beat me at anything. Once more I bent over the plate, advancing a sensitive and reluctant tongue-tip nearer and nearer the deadly surface. The

suggestive opportunity was too great a temptation to Henry—him of the creative imagination. He suddenly “bobbed” my head on the back, and down went nose and chin *and* out-reaching tongue into the noisome stuff. Moreover, my sudden impact with the plate knocked it off the window sill and its contents splashed darkly over the floor.

With great presence of mind I remembered that I must not close my mouth or risk swallowing any of the deadly liquid. I snatched Henry’s handkerchief, usually scorned for its complexion, and hastily wiped all the submerged portion. I didn’t know how rapidly the poison would act, but the instinct of self-preservation bade me ward off the final moment as long as possible. There was not the slightest doubt, however, that my end was only a matter of brief time and that a very few minutes would probably see the tragedy.

I gazed at Henry in a sort of acute stupor, and he blinked at me in return, overwhelmed at the result of a perfectly natural act.

In spite of everything, I could not help being aware of the dramatic value of the situation as

say anything adequate it did not seem worth while to express myself at all. But, of course, I could not accept his implied apology for poisoning me.

Henry felt in his pockets and took another thought.

“Have a peppermint?” he suggested cordially.

Again I shook my head and turned my eyes on the window. Henry weighed the peppermint in his fingers a moment and then ate it himself.

Somewhat cheered by the naturalness of the act, he came back to normal, and said, “I’ll bet it won’t hurt at all.”

This was insulting. I wouldn’t fail to die now for anything.

An empty pause followed. My mother came through the room. I had been hoping that she would. That chance would afford a natural way of breaking the news.

But all she said was, “Close your mouth, dear. That isn’t nice.”

And she went out.

That was the last straw. I had been supposing that my mother would feel the situation in-

stinctively, as she always did. Her imperception was a disappointment. I had already begun to take a sort of poignant enjoyment out of a vision I was rapidly constructing of a final scene, with all the family present, and the repentant Maldy and Henry receiving the cold shoulders of all the others. Evidently I should have to reconstruct that gratifying view. I closed my mouth with a snap, and took up my sunbonnet, a convention of dress which I ignored as often as possible. Henry rose with a relieved air, pleased that the unusual and embarrassing situation had come to an end.

“Want to get out the pony?” he asked sociably.

But I said impassively, “No,” and went on my way.

There didn’t seem to be any use in dying if one weren’t going to get any more out of it than this. And still I didn’t like to give up the idea. Anyway, I was sure I was going to die, whether I wanted to or not. I would just have to make the most of it on my own account, and have it, like other large experiences, all to myself. One more possibility remained. My fa-

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ther was coming toward the house, and I directed my steps so as to cross his path. He ought at least to have a chance on such an occasion as this. But all he did was to say, noticing the direction in which I seemed to be going, "Don't eat any of those cherries yet, daughter. They won't be ripe enough for another week."

I had to wait a moment before I could say my obedient "Yes, sir." And there was so much that I might have said if I could have brought myself to do it! This was more than disappointment. It was a blow. I could have shed tears had not pride forbidden. To have it thought that I was after green cherries when I already had fly-poison in my system! It was my first really profound trial of having a great experience belittled, and it cut deep.

I wandered out to where the mover was buried and sat down. I didn't choose the spot, but it seemed to lie in my way, and I paused to consider its appropriateness as a place for meditation. This was our nearest approach to knowledge of a graveyard, but it had always seemed inadequate in every way, and quite devoid of sentimental suggestion. The real



pathos of the forgotten grave on a stranger's land seemed lost on everyone except my mother, who sent us to put flowers on it on Memorial Day, and had a man renew the wooden slab from time to time. But I think my father rather regretted the kindness which had allowed it to be placed there. Scattered bits of blue grass from the carefully cherished growth on the lawn struggled with the prairie grass which still held these outskirts, and a spare yellow blossom of Indian blood-root, as we erroneously called it, lent a scanty bit of grace of its kind. But the atmosphere of the spot was too commonplace to be effective. We children had raced by it too often to have any feeling connected with it at all, any more than with any other place. I looked at it now with a vague notion of sympathy, but for the moment I was more interested in dying than in being dead.

So, finding nothing companionable here, I rose and wandered on down the road. One of the men passed me, driving on a hay-rack, and I caught on behind and balanced myself neatly, though abstractedly, on the projecting end of

the reach. We jolted along down to the farm gate and up the road a little way. Then the man turned into a field. It was only a wheat-field, where no entertainment promised, or solace for a doomed one, so I jumped off and stopped on the road.

I didn't know what I wanted to do next. The lack of sympathy and of understanding which had been shown me within the last hour gave me a vague feeling of detachment from my family and from everything else. I didn't see anything to do out on the road, but at the same time I didn't see anything to do anywhere. I looked up and down along the line of yellow wagon-track, with the sparse prairie-grass and immigrating weeds forming its border. The road toward town and the more thickly-settled country to the east of us was quite familiar to me in all its scanty detail, and now promised no new interest. In the other direction it led away, past my father's land and past an unpainted, rust-streaked farmhouse or two, and then on across a piece of open prairie. I had heard my father and other men complain because its eastern owners did not have this land

broken up and settled, but I did not know how extensive it was, and I had never been at all curious about it or what lay beyond it, for I had no great faith in its possibilities.

But when one is being shaken out of relationship to all normal things by a new experience, one prefers the unknown to the known. So, without any special choosing, I began to loiter along the road to the prairie in a large indifference to coming results. I heard the creak and rattle of a wagon behind me and settled my pace to a steady trudge, so that I might seem to have business on the highway. The wagon came nearer, overtook me, passed me, and I looked up, to see that it was an emigrant wagon, with the dusty, weathered canvas top and the bony, tired team that always belonged with the emigrant wagon, and the usual dog under the wagon and the extra horse nibbling along behind.

We were expressly forbidden to have anything to do with the movers; but what is law to one set apart as I was then? I promptly caught on behind, holding to the edge of the feed-box which was always attached to the back of a

mover-wagon. The dog sniffed at me a little, but he was such a limp, skinny dog that I ventured to kick at him haughtily, and he curved himself sideways and slunk up nearer to the horses and said nothing more about it. The blank canvas cover showed no eye watching me, and the heavy wagon moved stolidly along as if following a dull purpose of its own. It became rather amusing to think that I was making use of it, and its unseen owners did not even know that I was there. Merely keeping up with the slow horses did not take all my energy and, forgetting my precarious physical condition, I hopped on one foot and then on the other and jumped up to try to see in through the canvas, and hooked my elbows over the edge of the feed-box and dragged my toes in the dust, looking over my shoulder to see what sort of track I was making. I began to have a pretty good time.

I really meant to quit and go back home soon, for, after all, the entertainment of this was easily exhausted. But all at once a voice above me said, "Want a ride, little girl?" and there was a mover-woman looking at me

through the opening in the canvas at the back.

Somewhat to my own surprise I promptly answered, "Yes."

I should hardly have supposed that I would venture to do so, but having made the daring decision I rather respected myself for my courage and stood by it. The wagon stopped with a slow creak and somebody held back a flap of the canvas at the side, while I climbed up by means of the wheel and the clumsy brake, and effected an entrance between the wobbly hoops that supported the cover. I was very prim and sedate as I scrambled in, head first, and took a seat on the pile of bedding the woman pointed me to, but inwardly I was all agog. This was the most exciting thing that had happened to me for many a day—more so even than the fly-poison.

I naturally had a momentary feeling of triumph over Henry as I smoothed down my skirt and placed my feet carefully to avoid putting them into any of the utensils which were toppling about. I had a fleeting thought of the effectiveness with which I would tell him about it, a vision which made it desirable to live to

return home. The movers and the mover-wagons had always had a mystery that belonged to no other people or things we knew. They were so strange, in their eternal going and going, carrying all their possessions with them as they moved, like people without the ordinary ties of life. We had often tried to get a glimpse into the dim well of their wagons, but had never succeeded to our satisfaction.

And now the chance was bestowed on me—not on Henry or John. I tried to hold my curiosity in leash as I looked about me, so as not to see everything at once and thus gloss over the effect. I fixed my attention on one thing at a time, slowly staring at each object—from the lank, hairy man on the seat in front, to the mangy gray cat sleeping on the bag of corn-meal at the end of the wagon-bed—while the woman on her part stared at me.

I had never seen so many things, it seemed to me. All the necessities of living—if one wanted to live under these conditions—had been thrown together into this narrow, low-arched space. The mussy bedding where I was perched, and the trunk where the woman sat

holding the baby, and the box where the little boy lay asleep, were only the substructure or nuclei for bundles and boxes and bags and rolls, all more or less dilapidated, and disclosing commonplace and uninviting contents, like side-meat or dried beef or soiled clothes. Among those were other articles, no less commonplace—old shoes and pans and a jug or two and a tin wash-basin and a skillet bearing traces of recent dinner. Things hung from the canvas cover and menaced our heads as they swung about. A boot-jack lay among the other objects, and I wondered if it were really a necessary article to take along on such a trip.

All the time I was looking the mover-woman was looking at me. She sat opposite me, her toes touching mine, although I tried to screw away as far as possible. She had a brown face and little winking black eyes, and she wore a limp, gray calico dress. She wanted to know a great many things. I had never met anyone with so amazing an appetite for unmeaning facts. She wanted to know my name and where I lived, and whether my pa and ma were both living, and how many brothers and sisters

I had and their order of succession, and how much land my pa had and whether it was all paid for or had a mortgage on it, and whether he had made the money himself or had a legacy—she pronounced it *légacy* and I didn't know what she meant, but said no anyway—and where my pa and ma lived before they came here, and whether they liked it here, and what was the price of land, and whether my ma had right smart of chickens this year, and whether we ate our fries or sold them. She felt the texture of my gingham dress between her crooked finger and thumb and asked how much it was a yard, and if my ma made it, and if she had the pattern of my sunbonnet, and if I could cook, and if I had pieced a quilt.

That was only a part of what she asked me. Sometimes her phrases were strange to me, but I felt bound to answer anyway. I wondered, in an uneasy way, whether she were polite. And, unlike most grown-ups who had conversed with me, she seemed to expect an answer to every question and made no allowance for either shyness or ignorance. When she talked she forgot to keep the flies off the baby,



and they buzzed about its poor little eyes and mouth. The little boy had gone to sleep in the midst of eating a cold pancake spread with molasses, and the uneaten and forgotten half had dropped from his sleepy fingers and lay on the quilt beside him. It, too, as well as his molasses-streaked little face, was visited by many flies, crawling stickily on their besmeared legs.

My curiosity about movers was waning. It did not seem now as if there could be anything interesting about people like these. Even the Pucketts were more likable. They told me things instead of always asking questions. I had wanted tremendously to ask the woman about herself, but I didn't know how to begin. And, after all, it didn't seem worth while to find out about a woman who didn't keep the flies off her children. I felt very uncomfortable in telling how many acres my father had and how many dresses I had myself; but how could I help answering her when she stopped and looked at me with her bright black eyes and worked her mouth in that nervous way?

I didn't know what to do. Home had sud-

denly become very attractive. I had had chance dreams sometimes of riding off in a mover-wagon to a land of new experience, but I never could have imagined that the unknown contents of the wagon included flies and unwashed skilletts and women who worked their mouths that way and asked so many questions. I found nothing bookish or romantic in it. I wished I were back home, but I didn't know how to get away.

The slouching man on the wagon-seat suddenly helped me by asking abruptly, "How fur you goin', sis?"

I raised the flap of the cover and looked out. We had passed far beyond the last of the dreary farmhouses, and straight before me, to the south, lay the open prairie. There was nothing else in view, house or fence or road. But I said promptly, "I want to get out right here."

And, without waiting even for the man to bring his slow horses to a stop, I was out, with my foot on the brake, and jumped to the ground. Both man and woman looked after me curiously. I paused to say politely, "Thank

you very much for the ride," and then set off straight into the prairie, as if I had urgent business there. As soon as the wagon was out of sight I would turn around and follow the road toward home, now grown desirable, poison or no poison.

The road here lay along a side-hill, and in front of me the prairie sloped up for a few rods, to the hill-top. I walked straight up the little ascent, so conscious of looks following me that I scarcely noticed what was before me until I had dipped over the crest of the hill. Then, out of sight of the wagon, and relieved of the embarrassment of watching eyes, I stopped suddenly and began to see.

For a moment I could do nothing but see. I scarcely breathed or consciously felt. I only looked. A long, long, irregular valley lay before me, with hill-slopes cutting down into it occasionally from each side. It all spread out in gentle curves, with soft risings and slow descents, and it was all, all clothed in the rare full green of the prairie-grass, which lay over the hill-tops and deepened into the valleys, and made every line and curve of the landscape

soft with grace and willingly tender. The south wind came up into my face as I stood. It seemed to be a-work enriching all I saw. It made the grass buoyant with windy ripples on its green surface. It bent the blades curve-wise, until the sun glinted on their sides and the hills shone in places with gold in their green. Down in the hollow, where the rich slough-grass grew high, it made deep waves, with lovely shadings from pale to dark. It died away softly to a mere stirring and then came back with a sudden joyful gust, and mingled rhythmic movement with the sweet quiet of all that lay before me.

An occasional flower raised its head: not many, only enough to enliven the color of the grass. There were the red sweet-william and the prairie-pea and the wild verbena, and others whose names I did not know, and never would know, since they went away with the prairie and never came back. Here and there the green was dotted with sturdy "nigger-heads," with their rich mahogany centers and faintly pink fringes.

When at last I stirred from my little trance

and drew a long happy breath of absorption, my hand dropped on one of these as I stood there, and without looking at it I clasped the whole top in my small fist, squeezing the prickles of the cushiony center hard against the sensitive place in my palm. I knew the nigger-head well. It had neither romance nor mystery, and was as unsympathetic a creation as could go by the name of flower. But now its familiarity and its uncomfortable prickliness, as I stood holding it, seemed to form a tether to all the practical familiar things outside of this green vista. And this subconsciousness of other things made all that was before me seem the more exquisite. But soon I loosed my hold on it and moved a little farther down the slope. There again I stood to look and look, following curve after curve of the green, where it stretched off to the south, rising over a hill and dipping into a valley, and finally climbing a last slope to reach the mysterious thing that was the horizon line.

I can't tell what strangeness lay in the line of wonder where the blue of the sky met the green of the hills. It was a mystery which

far transcended in remoteness and promise any pot of gold of any childish tradition. That line itself held my attention. I had never before found myself where I could follow the full sweep of it all round. Now I revolved slowly, tracing the long ellipse which inclosed the narrow valley, lifting itself over the crest of a hill or dropping into a soft curve at the head of a draw. The completeness of the line fascinated me and I followed it round twice. I had never imagined it thus unbroken. I looked from the green to the blue and back again, and then at the fine definition of line where they met.

For once I had no wonder as to what lay beyond that line, in either the green or the blue. The completeness and simplicity of what the horizon bounded set it off into a world by itself—a whole world, but so simple. And I was the only person in it.

I had never before been alone in any such degree as this. To be sure, there had been pleasant afternoons in the orchard, and surreptitious hours in the granary or barn-loft, in company with a forbidden book. But that

was not complete isolation. At any moment some one might call me; or Henry or John, or both of them, might appear. Brothers have an energetic pervasiveness which makes any retirement insecure. A possibility, if not an actuality, intruded on every such moment and interfered with absolute solitude.

But here was a real aloneness, a solitude that was almost tangible, and—I discovered—an exquisite, an adorable thing. It made everything mine in a way I had never known before and couldn't realize completely enough for my satisfaction now. Even my self seemed more mine than it ever had at those times when some one might break in at any moment with an outside demand upon me. I dropped down into the grass, forgetting all about my intention of going home. "A green thought"—I began to myself, for there is great pleasure in applying a bit of poetry when there is no one else around. "A green thought"—But the rest of the phrase would not fit, and I had to let poetry lapse for the time and merely look and listen, allowing the prairie to define itself.

A sort of noiseless sound lived through the

stillness, a sound which had no beginning, and which could never have an ending, one would think. It was made up of everything there—the wind and the grass and the faintly sounding water in the tiny hidden creek among slough-grass, and all the little lives among the green growth. I could almost believe, as I raised my eyes, that the softly-departing clouds had a part in it, so gentle and continuous was the sound. It seemed to be just a tender vocalization of mere living. When a bird's call dropped into it sometimes it was only a phrase that melted into all the rest.

Listening seemed only to make looking all the more intent. This was a landscape, for this moment at least, completely satisfying. Here was no great variety to draw the eye from detail to detail in a way that interfered with mood and forbade absorption. It was a whole eyeful, of only the two elements, the green of the grass and the blue of the sky. Either would have been enough for man's desire. The two were riches beyond grasping. The sky was noble, now absolutely cloudless, a great half-globe of blue. It deepened from the lighter



rim, where it seemed to come near, at the horizon, to the exquisite remoteness straight above me, where the blue became bluer the longer I looked into it. Golden-blue I called it to myself as I dwelt upon it.

I sprang to my feet and ran, my sunbonnet thrown back on my shoulders, so that I might feel the moving softness of the south wind in my face, and my arms spread wide as if to grasp all I saw. If anyone had been there to see me I could not have done it. But for once a world was my own. The wind seemed to be bringing the grass toward me, in a constant motion, and I ran to meet it. I ran and ran, in a sort of ecstasy of all I realized of the place, the prairie wind in my hair, the prairie-grass about my feet, the prairie sun in my eyes. Every minute was an adventure in life.

There is no time in a place like that. After a while I began to notice that the sunlight, sloping down the western hill, was catching the tops of the grasses instead of penetrating among them. Then there came a little indistinctness

on the horizon line and a milky haziness in the farther end of the valley. But I put off thinking of the meaning of these things or deciding what I should do next. It seemed to me that if I went out of this place I could never come back. This day was different from all other days. Home and everything else were remote from this valley of grasses.

A shout—two shouts—broke across the continuity of sweet sound in my ears. I looked behind me and saw two figures on horseback, one on the edge of the hill-top and a smaller one nearer, moving toward me. They were my father and Henry, both standing in their stirrups and scanning the landscape. My first impulse was to keep still, and I sat unreplying. But Henry had not helped to hunt cattle on the prairie for nothing. He turned and whistled shrilly to my father, who settled down in his saddle and waited, while Henry came dashing up to me. Relief was plainly evident in his face, but he was not too much absorbed to put the pony through a mild imitation of bucking as he approached. Indignation suc-

ceeding to anxiety was apparent in his tone as he demanded,

“What in Sam are you doing out here?”

“I thought I would take a walk,” I answered with quiet dignity as I rose and shook out the skirt of my dress.

“Well, you’d better walk back home for a walk, and it’s four miles.”

It was plainly a relief to Henry to find me on the wrong side again. I surmised that the story of the fly-poison had been divulged, and found my own poise. With calm assurance I ignored him and walked straight up to where my father waited.

He said only, “All right, daughter?” and drew me up on the horse behind him, and we cantered off home, Henry and the pony trailing along in the rear.

I didn’t look back as we went along. But I laid my cheek up against my father’s shoulder, as I held fast to him, and shut my eyes. And I could still see and see and see the moving green of the prairie grass and the golden-blue of the sky.

## THE PATH OF LEARNING

WE could go to school by either of two ways. We could follow the drive down to the gate and take the road east for nearly a quarter of a mile and then turn south for a mile, at the end of which, where the section roads crossed, we should find the schoolhouse. Taking this way we would go along between barbed-wire fences, bordered with a shaving of scant prairie grass, and when we got to the top of one hill we would see another just like it before us. The advantages of this way were almost entirely social. Other children came and went along the road and we had the pleasure of exchanging views on current topics with them—they knew a great deal that we did not know—and of getting tags at successive gates. The scanty traffic of the road afforded varied interest, too, as well as a chance of rides with the good-natured drivers who overtook us. Many different kinds of men

went along that road, but there was rarely one who, if he had room at all to spare or any horse-strength, did not pull up when he was beside us, with a "Whoa" and a push on the creaking brake, and a cordial "Want a ride?"—the word we had been waiting for. If it did not come he was a mean thing and the boys made demonstrations in the rear of the wagon to illustrate their opinion.

The social intercourse of the road had an added attraction because, as we did not usually take that way, we were regarded by the others as company of a sort, and had the advantage of their hospitality. We took the road when it was wet weather, or in winter when the snow was deep or soft, or when some impulse of sociability led us to walk home with the other children. At other times we cut down through the orchard,—a very convenient thing to do at the right season—and then along a farm-road beside a cornfield, then over the half-mile fence, and finally across a quarter-section of original prairie, still unbroken. That way was a half-mile shorter than the other and we were encouraged to take it in suitable weather, for one

of the vague or unuttered because of which grown-ups had always an endless store in mind.

Aside from its convenience this path offered many allurements. It was surprising that we reached school at all, there was so much to see along the way. The orchard itself—from the time when the burnished mahogany of its tops changed to the faint rosiness of the closed buds and then to the cool pink of the open blossoms, and we breathed hard and deep all the way through it to get all possible of this enriching air, until the day when the last wagon had driven around to gather up the “down apples”—offered us a hundred reasons for staying along the way. If nothing else delayed us, we—Mary and I, that is, not the boys—must take a bouquet for the teacher or for the home decoration of our desks, where the stems were thrust precariously into a topply bottle or into the shallow depths of the inkwell. The bouquet came from a Ben Davis or Limbertwig tree, though; the most reckless person would not sacrifice a Jonathan or Red June possibility.

The orchard once passed, we sped along

pretty rapidly by the milder attractions of the cornfield and the farm-road, unless a butcher-bird on wire-fence or hedge-tree, or a harmless blue-racer, or a toiling family of tumble-bugs made us pause. No one has written a book about tumble-bugs, although they are much more interesting than bees. If a snake were certainly harmless, Henry and John conscientiously killed it, even at the risk of tardiness. If it bore the dreadful tradition of being deadly poisonous, they let it escape. We should have liked one of those new-fashioned schools where the pupils arrive at their own sweet will, as welcome at eleven-thirty as at nine. We never found a teacher of that charming attitude of mind. Ours always had a predilection for keeping us after school—or worse still at recess—to make up delinquencies, or making us write our names in a *pæna* list on the blackboard. One discerning teacher made Henry write out the family list—knowing doubtless that within the family circle vicarious punishment does not long remain merely vicarious.

Beyond the cornfield a barb-wire fence waited to be crossed. Anyone who has crossed

a barb-wire fence, at least anyone who wears the garments of civilization, knows what exigencies and problems that offers. But after the fence came the stretch of prairie grass. Half the flavor of going to that country school would have been lost had we not had the experience of crossing the wild grass in the mornings and evenings. That made a frame into which all the events of the day were set. Early summer mornings when the grass was only shoe high, soft and springy under foot and deliciously green, and the meadow-larks' calls dotted its quiet here and there, and we couldn't help, however good our intention, darting out of our way for just a minute to pluck a violet or a wild verbena, or a horse-pipe to take apart and stick together again; June mornings when the sweet wild strawberries colored the southward sloping hillsides and we barely escaped being late to school, our fingers and lips telling the tale of our foraging, even at that; September mornings when we found bulrushes ripe brown in the slough our path skirted, and chased each other with stiff, dry bristles of jimson weed; late autumn mornings



when the tardy sunrise reddened all the lovely pink in the drying bunches of prairie grass, even while the frost lay on the yellow upper blades, and we raced with the wild tumble-weeds, and reached school all prickly with broken bits of tickle grass secreted in unreachable places among our garments; autumn evenings, when all the grass lay pale under a dead gray sky and the strange cry of the fleeing wild geese came down to us from far up in the grayness, and we sped along home to a warm supper and a cozy indoors; sunny winter days, with the grass crisp under foot and a bright blue sky curving over the rose and buff of the prairie—or else over acres of light snow, smooth and unbroken save where a man had been sent along to make a path for us; and then early spring again, and the wild geese going back, joyful this time we thought, and the floating V of the wild ducks, and the green creeping up from the roots of the grasses, and the sharp, satisfying smell of burning corn-stalks in the air—these and a thousand other things formed the experiences which led us up to the door of the schoolhouse in the morn-

ing and caught us up there again in the evening, when we had finished quips and pungent courtesies with the other children at the schoolhouse door and set off on our own road.

The schoolhouse itself differed from the hundreds that have appeared in literature, in that it had not a single romantic element in its construction or surroundings. Its little square yard was enclosed by a smooth wire fence and the moth-eaten remnants of an osage orange hedge, and was set out with a few cottonwoods and box-elders, still small. A long hitching-rack, the bark all worn away from the poles by the teeth of "mully-grubbing" horses and the feet of young acrobats, surrounded it, and a stile allowed us to cross the fence—of more use for social purposes, however, than for this, since no one would wait to cross a stile when it took only an instant to roll under the fence. The schoolhouse sat by the road and I suppose it could be called a ragged beggar sunning, since the shade was scanty and it was never all in repair at once. It was of the general proportions of a Greek temple, but the resemblance to a Greek temple was remote. It bris-

tled fiercely with lightning-rods, a sign of the successful loquacity of some agent or of the scientific faith of the school directors. And there was a covered well-house at the side of the yard.

The well-house was mainly a show, however. For when the rope was not broken the well needed cleaning—for reasons frankly explained by the children—and when the water was drinkable the windlass-handle was gone or the bucket was staved in. These things did not matter, however. It would have been a great pity if the well had been always usable, because then we could not have brought the water from the Browns' well, half a quarter down the road. A journey to the Browns' was a rare excursion, especially for us smaller children, since the big boys and girls were likely to arrogate the privilege entirely to themselves. The Browns had not only a well, but a loom where a grandmother worked, weaving rag-carpet, and a cider-mill and a sorgum-press and a leach, trickling off lye for soft soap. There was always reason for hanging around to watch some interesting operation. The Browns

made sauerkraut too, and had a smokehouse, and there was always something going on there which did not occur at our house, and which added to the joy of going for water.

We drank a great deal of water, I believe. There was scarcely an hour on a spring day when some public-spirited one was not offering to pass the water or to fetch a fresh bucket from the Browns' well. The ceremony of passing the water added some of the charms of social intercourse to our academic pursuits. It was almost like serving afternoon tea. The passer put on little graces and manners and took the opportunity to exchange persiflage, sometimes involving a sly liquid retort, with the passees. We made it a point to show our fastidiousness by drinking as close to the handle of the dipper as possible, a spot which was supposed to be sequestered. Nine-tenths of us drank from that place.

As it seems to me now, the elements of this section of our education consisted of the following things: slate-rags, the Fifth Reader, notes, passing the water, headmarks, what the big girls said, Blackman and a torn dress,

spilled ink and pokeberry substitute, the big boys, apples, staying in, speaking pieces on Friday, cube root, the dinner-bucket, geography—the book, not the science—partial payments, chronological recapitulations. I suppose we learned a few other things, but these are all I remember. They are the projecting mountain-tops above the general mist of education. Being educated is a hazy sort of thing anyway.

As to the slate-rag, the least said the soonest mended. But no object connected with our early intellectual development stands more clearly before my mental vision than that slate-rag—a fabric in dull grayish black, with an accompanying odor of Araby—and the small vial of water which all housewifely little girls affected. I can't claim that I was housewifely, but I was easily made emulous in any line; and in fact there are many purposes not domestic to which water may be put. So I, too, had my little bottle of water.

In a jocular or vindictive mood, you filled your bottle to the brim and then, after you had reached your seat, you put your thumb on the

mouth, turned casually in the direction of some one deserving such an attention, and pressed down your thumb. A simple law of physics took care of the result—though not always of the consequences. That was one of the advantages of using a bottle instead of keeping water in the ink-well—where we never kept ink; the teachers were too cautious for that. There were children who did not rise to the plane of owning bottles of water at all, but used a convenient natural resource. And there were some who did not have slate-rags but used their sleeves. But on the other hand there were priggish little girls, now doubtless high in the profession of domestic science, who flaunted their pride in the number and size and shade of their slate-rags, to a disgusting degree.

I suppose there was a time in the life of every slate-rag when it was white and dry and odorless. But that was an intimation of immortality early forgotten. Doubtless, by this time, every Board of Health has forbidden them entirely or else required daily fumigation. I generally had Augusta Horlocher (pronounced Highlocker) for a seatmate. Seat-

mateship, I may say in passing, has many elements of matrimony, and like it requires mutual forbearance and complementary virtues. Augusta was a domestic soul who spent more time in washing up the desk and putting my things over on my own side than she did in learning definitions. When Augusta emptied the water-bottle it was always for a worthy purpose. I can't say the same for myself, but I helped her—having got permission to communicate—with complex fractions. Poor Augusta never got beyond decimals. She washed her slate assiduously, but between times she never could get the answer.

I hardly know why it is the Fifth, of all the Readers, which I distinguish in memory, except that the Reader we were interested in was never the one out of which we were at the time supposedly learning to read and the contents of which were already tiresomely familiar, but one ahead of that, which we borrowed from the big girls to read at our desks. The Fifth Reader was in advance of us longer than any of the others, so, of course, I knew it the best. There was a Sixth Reader, we had heard, but

it was like a digamma or an ideal; no one had ever really seen one. Even the big girls never reached it.

Learning to read meant learning to read aloud. It didn't make any difference whether we learned to get the meaning from a "selection" by reading it to ourselves. The thing was to be able to pronounce the words out loud and to give the definitions at the bottom of the page. There were two rules for reading. One was to let your voice fall at the end of a sentence and not to read over a comma; the other was to read all the words in italics very loud, those in capitals *fortissimo*. That was a rule we could appreciate. There was a result to which definite measurement could be applied. In the Fourth Reader was a soft little poem which ended with a tender epitaph, printed in small capitals; we came out strong on that epitaph. When we read in concert, as we were fond of doing, for reasons which the sociologist and pedagogist know, one could have heard "SOMEBODY'S DARLING LIES BURIED HERE" a quarter of a mile away.

Did you ever get a note in school?—from



a boy?—from a big boy? I suppose there are other experiences in life that are comparable to this, but certainly there is nothing else at that time which combines the same elements, dramatic, embarrassing, gratifying, triumphant, delicious, queer. Not that there was anything in such a note—the outside, as the mis-sive first came to view, was much more thrilling than the contents. But the very sight of it—penciled on rough, bluish scratch-paper, and ragged-edged and rumpled—as it was flipped across an intervening space or offered slyly behind a geography or dropped on the desk as the writer went up to the A spelling class—gave a sensation not to be duplicated in any later years. The contents, I regret to say, were insignificant, negligible. It is to be hoped that the big boys learned more about the art in time. But the mere fact of getting such a note, of having it written to yourself, of forecasting the contents, of having the other girls see you get it, all that in addition to the exciting fear that the teacher might see—once she made a girl read a note out loud!—filled the moment with peculiar emotion.

Notes had a family connection with apples which appeared mysteriously in your desk or were offered slyly at recess, with gum-drops—available only on Monday, since people usually went to town on Saturday—with being chosen in Clap-In-and-Clap-Out, with valentines in the valentine box, with distinguished attentions in Drop-the-Handkerchief and such games, and—acme of romance!—with your name carved by some one, bold and unashamed, on some one's desk. The pleasures of the affair were largely factitious, however. The notes which looked so promising and had nothing in them were typical of the whole matter. It was all like Clap-In-and-Clap-Out or Miller-Boy. It was very exciting and gratifying to be chosen, but after you had settled down in partnership, shyly uncomfortable and unable to think of anything to say, the game was largely over for you—no more excitement, no suspense; you were merely an onlooker on life. Your partner in discomfort became very unattractive and you rather envied those not yet chosen. As you looked around you saw no one you liked less than the boy who had chosen you.

Cube root and partial payments were the two great mountain peaks of the science—I had almost called it the art—of arithmetic. Many a climber faltered and failed before he reached the dizzy heights of their summits. To have mastered them was to have a reputation for scholarship and intellectual attainment, not only in the school but in the whole neighborhood and even in adjoining ones, which nothing could shake. When, at a ciphering-match, after other competitors had been following the easy paths of cancellation and long division, you called for “cube root” with an easy nonchalant air, an audible breath of admiration came from the ranks of your allies and visible consternation, mingled with awe, spread among your foes. It was almost glory enough for one life. When you came to the last great problem in partial payments—a Titanic problem, a problem to set Homeric heroes!—and you were chosen by the teacher to put it on the blackboard for the benefit of the class, it was a half-day’s work. You were excused from all other classes while you wrought at it. You essayed a modest demeanor while you explained it to

the unsuccessful ones, but it was difficult to support.

It is an instance of the bad management of destiny that after all this preparation you should never be in the position of a large creditor with such a problem to solve, and that a bank-clerk can sum up all your little finances with a few clicks of an insignificant machine. I supposed at such moments of glory that in my riper years I should spend a part of every morning computing interest and courteously accepting partial payments. So much of our education is useless to us.

Chronological recapitulations afforded a chance to achieve the same sort of scholarly triumph that partial payments did. Studying history meant reading along hazily about this and that, with only one thing really clear, namely, that the United States was always right, no matter what it was doing, and whoever interfered was wrong, wickedly, shamelessly wrong. We came out on solid ground about once a month, however, when we reached a chronological recapitulation. Here were concrete facts, isolated, to be sure, and rather

meaningless; but “committing” them was a definite task, to which we could buckle down with a satisfying effort of will. When learned they were to be written in a long list on the blackboard. You wrote them by putting down all the dates first, in a wavy disjointed line, and then, beginning at the top, you set in order the appropriate happenings. Sometimes you forgot, and left gaps in the progress of events, where important dates stood alone, begging for facts to prove their distinction. Something happened in 1775, you meditated with chalk on lip—but what was it? A chronological recapitulation was a leveling process, where all events assumed precisely the same importance. It was a kind of historical multiplication table. Sometimes the class recited the list in concert, a popular form of recitation which made individual weakness inconspicuous. The performance began in full chorus,

1607 Virginia was settled at Jamestown.

1609 Henry Hudson navigated the Hudson River.

1610 Starving-time prevailed in Virginia.

But only a quartette survived into the eighteenth century, two of these fell in the hardships of colonial life, and only a soloist sighted the French and Indian war. Glory waited the soloist, however, and in so difficult a feat as this the failure of the others was regarded as something to be condoned.

There were other chances for academic distinction, such as the writing-lesson, in which, however, proficiency was of a distinctly low order,—Augusta had a beautiful copy-book and never spilled her ink,—and headmarks, which one could achieve in either reading or spelling. The glory which went with headmarks was not of so fine a type as that which was attained through partial payments or chronological recapitulation, but still one would not be without it. Even in speaking pieces one could attain a sort of eminence, though in this, as in all artistic achievement, the result was less definite and logically certain than in the pursuit of pure scholarship. I got my pieces largely from Chambers' *Cyclopedia of English Literature*, where I found many a thing that suited my fancy, at least; whatever other merits they

lacked, they had the virtue of variety. But I suspect the audience liked them much less than the selections from the ragged *Speaker Number Three*, which came into requisition weekly.

As I recall the process of education now, the lunch-basket seems to occupy a disproportionately large place in it. It was more frequently a bucket,—we preferred to say bucket, though the most of the children said pail,—since a bucket stood the physical strain better than a basket, and was more easily replaced from month to month. A great many different situations and dramatic interests and physical joys and sorrows were connected with that daily dinner-bucket. From the moment when Maldy or my mother packed it brimfull in the morning and tucked in the special red-bordered make of napkin which was devoted to school use, until we dropped the empty bucket inside the kitchen door at night and were promptly bidden by Maldy to pick it up and put it away, it was, one might say, an active element in our lives. In the first place there was the daily—semi-daily, in fact—question as to who was to carry it. Dramatic and emotional possibili-

ties hovered about this problem, which was no simple one. It involved intricate issues of precedence and succession and privilege and physical superiority and age and sex and who did it last and vigor of conscience and proportion of appetite and some occasional problems which no system could foresee or provide for.

Mary shamelessly pleaded privilege of sex and age. But I, being a suffragist by birth and so prideful as to be loth to acknowledge physical inferiority, accepted my turn as a matter of principle and only contended that I should not have more than my turn. Having brothers is a great quickener of moral courage. One day Henry, who was at times sophisticated beyond belief, proved by some masculine system of logic that if women ought to vote I ought to carry the bucket as often as both he and John; and they set the lunch at my wrath-paralyzed feet and went racing off. The spirit of Deborah and Semiramis and all the rest of them descended upon me. I placed the bucket in a fence-corner, hid it with a clot of tickle-grass, and went high-mindedly on. The look on the faces of the boys when they discovered



my act sustained me in many an hour afterward; and they never tried the experiment again. After being generously supplied from our neighbors' buckets at noon, we resurrected our own lunch on the way home and ate it in restored amity, tinged with respect on the part of the boys, I was pleased to notice. Henry carried the bucket home.

That was not the only time when we found ourselves dinnerless. Sometimes through real forgetfulness or genuine misunderstanding of the transportation system, the packed bucket remained standing on the kitchen table, and we were left at noon, or rather at recess,—for no one could wait until noon—unsupplied with what seemed at times to be the main object of going to school. The result, however, was far from tragic. The readiness with which the other children divided their own resources and laid their offerings before us was entirely characteristic of the temper of the prairie. I had never been in the Eckharts' house and never would be, but I ate with cordial relish their cold boiled eggs and their pieplant pie, with its subconscious flavor of sauerkraut. The

relish was partly superinduced by curiosity, however. This was a fine opportunity to test the contents of other dinner-buckets, on which we had looked with curious and speculative eye. Some of the children had the custom of trading select morsels in moments of cordial intimacy, but that was forbidden by the authorities at our house, I didn't know why. We couldn't even exchange apple-cores, after the pleasant sociable manner of the Huffs and Browns. I tried it once, exchanging the luscious, translucent heart of a Jonathan for the dry remains of a Ben Davis, mysteriously but unmistakably flavored with sausage and that bread-and-butter taste which is undesirable except in bread and butter. I wasn't sure but there was a taste of Huff on it too. After that experiment it was easy to obey the injunction not to trade.

But, on the occasions when we were thus the objects of public charity, we courteously sampled everything that came our way, from the rich brown-topped coffee-cake of the Eckharts—again with the sauerkraut flavor—to the cold biscuit with only milk and sugar for “spread,” proffered by the poor Burnhams, whose father

was a renter. The opportunity was as valuable as a whole course in sociology. The Huffs were renters too, but they had mince pie and cold sausage.

In bad weather or on rainy days the lunch pervaded the whole noon hour, reappearing at intervals and filling in the interstices of Clap-In-and-Clap-Out or charades. At these times we set out our provisions on the desk-tops and began the meal with some show of ceremony. On other days, when the normal excitements of Blackman or Dare-Base or coasting called us, we dispatched our lunches so rapidly that they hardly seemed to have existed at all, and took a prompt departure for the outdoors, holding a final slice of bread and jam aloft on a smeary palm, and eating it into a neat curve around the edges. The most conscientious member of the family was always left to put away the remains. It is needless to say that Mary put away ours.

The real epicure of the school was Augusta Horlocher. All pictures of the noon hour were pervaded by her. Augusta in a mood of easy friendliness, cracking her hard-boiled eggs—

the pickled limes of our time—on the forehead of her intimate for the day, or, in a period of soul-aloneness, on her own brow; Augusta scraping the greater part of the preserves over to one corner of a slice of bread, so that the last bite should be preëminently the best; Augusta eating roll-jellycake and reveling in the mechanical process, following round and round its snail-like convolutions without once removing it from her lips until the center was reached; Augusta retiring with her choicest morsel to a quiet corner where no covetous glance could seem to urge her to divide; pictures like these showed an art of enjoyment which none of the rest of us ever attained.

It was through the big girls, I believe, that the major part, the really desirable part, of our education was carried on. They had attained a wisdom of life which, amidst the reserve practiced by the elders at our house, I despaired of ever reaching. The big girls knew so many things which I did not know and which in fact no one at our house seemed to know. It behooved me to be hanging about, listening to what they had to say to each other—only

they so often whispered—and picking up any savory crumb of knowledge they kindly dropped for me.

What greatness the big girls possessed! They were so worldly-wise, so authoritative. I can't remember that they shone academically; they often bore, very lightly, too, the ignominy of being in classes with us, and even at that by no means outstripped us. They even had to be "put back" on occasion. But at recess and noon it was different. Then we dropped into our proper place and they rose to theirs. No one else can ever be so grown up as they were. Every sign of maturity about them was a wonder.

Augusta was really more impressed than I was. All other incentives to ambition had passed over Augusta, leaving her unmoved; but the ambition to grow up bit her hard. When she should have been committing her spelling-lesson, she was slyly but seriously piling her hair on top of her head. And she spent much time in sitting out to the end of the seat and letting her skirt hang straight down until it touched the floor, so that it would look long

and grown-up. She would look down on this expanse of trailing garment and feel her small stack of hair and wave the fan made from a leaf cut neatly out of her copy-book and carefully wimpled, and apparently have the most blissful feelings.

As for me, I coveted the knowledge of the big girls more than I did their years. There was Amanda Huff. I learned a good deal from her while she sat in front of me. Amanda was quite sixteen, an age which we understood marked an epoch in feminine experience. She was going to stop school pretty soon, she was so big. Even now she very readily staid out for house-cleaning or the baby or washing. Joe Withers went to see her every Sunday night, and Monday morning in school, having got permission to "speak" to ask the grammar lesson, she told me all that had happened the night before. Her information marked clearly the stages in Joe's courtship, a progress to which, to do her justice, Amanda was offering no obstructions. I was a young confidant, but a very responsive one. I learned a good deal from Amanda. But when I began to tell it to

my mother she spoke of having my seat changed, and I divulged no more. My mother's views on education by experience were limited.

Amanda was married the next year, and so lifted above companionship with me forever. I never attained the state of being a big girl myself, because my sojourn in the school was too short. So I never could know their feelings or their glory. They were still looking down on me as a little girl, I have no doubt, when on a June "last day" I stacked my other books and my slate upon my geography as a foundation, and carried them home across the prairie quarter-section for the last time. There were masses of blue spiderwort and white anemone down by the slough that day, I remember, and ripe strawberries among the grass.

## THE YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF ZELOPHEHAD

THE idea was John's originally; but Henry annexed it so promptly that it seemed in a minute or two to have been his all the time. That was no unusual occurrence. John and Henry presented, in practical matters, the relation of a colony and a mother-country—with constant taxation of ideas and grudgingly allowed representation in results. It did seem in those days as if Henry had the making of a statesman in him, his sense of relations was so clear and practical.

This time John's notion concerned finance, an unheard-of thing in John. Henry was hypothetically the financier of our body, although, as our resources rarely passed out of his hands, that made little difference to the rest of us. All our pecuniary transactions seemed to take much the same form,—a magnificent conception on Henry's part, his gracious permission



to the rest of us to fill subordinate places in its execution, and then a gathering in of the fruits by Henry himself. Not being entirely inexpressive, we sometimes demurred at this; but there seemed always to be a good masculine reason why this result should be entirely just and legal. John, with his dreamy head somewhere in the sky, didn't care much for money anyway, and I, being feminine, was quite unconvincing, and Mary was too small to command much attention. So the spending of our small profits, as well as the laying of our financial schemes, remained in Henry's hands.

The source of our profits was usually the heads of the family, or some of the adult transient members of the household—all adults seemed to be loaded with money, often having whole dollars in their pockets at once—and our processes were rather industrial than commercial. Hence John's sudden suggestion was sufficiently fascinating from its very novelty. He proposed, in fact, that we should go out into the public mart and engage in trade. We all held our breath for a moment at the enterprise of the suggestion. And then Henry,

recovering his, made the scheme his own in two sentences; and John immediately became a subordinate, a mere fetch-and-carry. Mary and I waited to be assigned places in the scheme of things.

The plan was so simple yet so adventurous in its way that it is a wonder none of us had ever thought of it before. Out in the orchard were ripe grapes and apples and some peaches, more of all than the household needed; at the end of the drive ran the county road, along which passed the hungry public. Could there be a more suggestive juxtaposition of supply and demand? Henry visualized it all instantly—the road a public mart, the eager public hungrily demanding, the immense profits certainly consequent upon trade. He was out in the world, a merchant, a financier, a capitalist. He expanded visibly before us as we eyed him. Awhile he mused, then assumed active command of us all.

On Wednesday there would be a meeting at the little county-seat, the road to which lay past our gate. Its purpose was trivial—politics, probably; we had not even thought of ask-

ing to be allowed to go. But we had gathered from talk at the table that many men would be there. The meeting would begin in the early afternoon; that meant that from ten o'clock on there would be a constant passing by our gate. Some of these travelers would come from the far west of the county, some from the scantily settled expanse to the northwest. They would all be hungry. Henry laid his plans.

Mary was sent to spread the scheme, in its meagerest outlines, before my father and mother. Mary's participation in an enterprise often ended with that. But somehow, in Mary's serious and honest telling, any exploit seemed to take on, not only plausibility, but positive merit. This time, however, my mother looked dubious, my father amused. Maldy lingered on a passing foot at the open door and looked at Mary with the complacence which Mary alone won from her. She recovered from that, however, to frown at Henry, skulking in dignified indifference outside the open window, and to express unsolicited disapproval—Maldy's opinion often outran solicitation—of the whole scheme.

"I want to make some money," said Mary gently but persistently. Mary was guileless as the rising moon, but it was wise for her to say *I* instead of *we*.

"Huuf!" said Maldy, and went on.

"Oh, let them do it," said my father in answer to my mother's look of reluctance. My father was in a hurry to be off somewhere. It was a true adventurer who went to ask a favor when the authority was in a hurry. The decision was instantaneous, but the necessity for haste worked sometimes for and sometimes against the petitioner. "It won't do any harm so long as people are going toward town—as soon as they begin to come back the children must come in—Do you understand?" My father raised his voice and Henry's head now appeared at the window.

I heard that regretfully, not because it curtailed the profits, but because it limited the experience. If men—the kind of men who went by on the road—were in any way different when they came back from a political meeting, I should like to see them. That mysterious thing called drunkenness, of which we read in

temperance stories, along with its well-detailed symptoms, I had never had a chance to observe. Henry submitted with a less impersonal reluctance; he saw nickels slipping past him.

But a "stand" at the roadside we were to have. Henry promptly issued orders—certain duties for me, certain others for John, minor ones for Mary. On Monday the stand was to be built, on Tuesday the fruit gathered and our minds prepared, on Wednesday the great transaction would begin, about ten o'clock. Henry was so busy giving orders that the time seemed to fly. He came out two or three times to help me get the baskets of grapes, but he always remembered something else that must be superintended and hurried off abruptly. Ever since I have known Henry I have understood what the term captain of industry means.

Tuesday night everything was ready. Inside the screened porch was our stock-in-trade, scores of apples and early peaches, baskets of grapes, a few of the ripest pears. A serious question had arisen while we collected them. As connoisseurs in fruit, within the limits of

our own orchards, we knew, to the last, finest degree, the palatability of every variety. There are some persons to whom an apple is an apple and a peach a peach, but we were none of that sort. We recognized delicate gradations of toothsomeness, and balanced nicely the relative allurements of choice varieties. A man might as well declare himself frankly Philistine and barbarian at once as voluntarily eat a Ben Davis and call it good. As amateurs of apples we could hardly bear the thought of offering any but what we knew to be the best to anyone. It was a betrayal of our own good taste. But on the other hand would it pay to sacrifice our cherished General Grants or our last high-in-the-tree Benonis, when the cottony Sops of Wine or the flat saccharine Ramsdale Reds would suit the indiscriminating public quite as well, and were bigger and rosier at that. Henry considered the matter and settled it from the viewpoint of mere commercialism rather than that of art. It would be an insult to *give* anyone a Sops of Wine—we always had difficulty with that plural—but there

would be no offense in selling them if we could do it.

So our rosy baskets, which looked so enticing, were really filled with what were, to us small epicures, the discards of the orchard, refused by our finer taste. If these did not prove enticing enough—if our customers had better judgment than we expected—Mary and I could hurry back and hastily gather some of the others, Henry said. “Anyway,” he added, “we are not going to try to sell to them when they come back.”

We sat in the dark considering prospects. A vague expectation of unsatisfaction disturbed me, but I repressed expression.

“I wish we had some watermelons,” said Henry, raising his voice but the least degree.

Maldy was sitting, also in the dark, just inside the kitchen window and we knew it. But Maldy said nothing.

After a pause, crowded with suggestion, Henry pursued, with the manner of one filling time and ears with pleasant conversation, “Everybody likes watermelon this time of year.”

There was still no sound from within the kitchen and conversation lapsed.

All the watermelons on the place belonged to Maldy; I don't know why, but this was the custom. My father said it was because she was the only one who could protect them adequately. Certain it is that no man or child interfered twice with Maldy's watermelons, even though they were the first to ripen and the finest to taste in the whole country. Maldy always made a show of being very stingy with them, and ended with being so generous that her own profits were scanty. Certainly these earliest-ripe watermelons would add great attraction to our stand. But Maldy said nothing.

Henry counted his change, the combined ready capital of all four of us. It was fortunate that it was all in small pieces.

"I," said Mary dreamily, "am going to buy a gold bracelet with my money." She ran imaginative fingers about her round little wrist. "Aunt Ella will get it for me when she goes back to New York."

"And I," I broke in enthusiastically, "will get a new *David Copperfield* with mine." *David*



*Copperfield* had come to us already old, and its choicest passages had long since been read into annihilation.

“We’re not going to divide up the money,” said Henry with simple authority. “We’re going to take it all and get a new gun with it.” Then to our silence he added. “We need a new saddle because mine is getting too small. But I guess we’ll get the gun.”

After a pause I spoke out. My spirit was Patrick Henry’s but my words were my own. I have forgotten them now but at the time they seemed eloquent and should have been convincing. That they were not was due to the limitations of the language, not to any lack of energy behind them. But Henry’s position was unchanged.

“Anyway,” he said, “John and I are going to do all the selling. You will have to stay back in the grove when there is anybody there.”

I paused abruptly in my rush of argument and contumely. This was a fresh blow. I had already had visions of myself in the new and attractive rôle of cordial and winning sales-

person, and had practiced little graces and urbanities among the grapevines, combining, as nearly as I could, my mother's gracious manner with her poorer visitors, and that of a shoe-clerk who had sometimes fitted me and whose ease I greatly admired. I had expected to add largely to our sales by my charm—and who knew what further it might all lead to?

“Well, I guess not, Mr. Henry!” I burst out with indignation which fettered expression.

“When there's nobody passing,” went on Henry, now fully committed to setting forth his policy, “you can come out. And you can bring rags and keep the dust wiped off everything—and things like that. But it ain't the place for girls.”

I was meditating a sufficient answer for this when Mary spoke.

“You are a mean thing,” she said.

She rose and said it again with greater emphasis, “You're a mean thing.”

Vituperation was foreign to Mary's tongue and her phrases were limited. She felt around on the dark floor for the prim elderly doll still dear to her eight-year-old heart, and took her

departure. Just beyond the door she paused again and her serious little voice came back to us out of the darkness with less of indignation in it than of sober conviction. "You're a mean thing," she repeated once more.

I heard Maldy's chair scrape on the kitchen floor and her solid step on the backstairs as she followed to see Mary to bed. Old as we were, Maldy had no faith in our putting of ourselves to bed, and her vesper visit to us was as certain as my mother's. We could not help thinking, however, that there was a precautionary element in Maldy's final look at us, which my mother's lacked. While we continued to sit there, in an uncomfortable, unadjusted silence, I could hear the distant murmur of her voice in Mary's room above, and I knew that she was comforting Mary. When Mary was in trouble she rarely said anything; but everyone in the house—except the cause of her distress—wanted to comfort her. I used to wonder how she accomplished it; there were times when I went without comforting.

The silence downstairs continued, unimpaired by conciliatory remarks, until we were

once more called from our musings to go to bed. In harassed moments life sometimes seemed to consist entirely of regretful retirings and reluctant arisings.

In the morning Mary seemed to melt away from the breakfast-table without anyone's noting her departure. That was not surprising. When Mary was at outs with the world she simply disappeared — usually to my mother's room—until either the situation or her mood was readjusted. My own policy was different. I was accustomed to remain active on the field of battle. This time my method was, I confess, inartistic, but it accomplished something. A dinner-pail full of strong brine, poised in unsteady hands over the finest baskets of grapes, brought Henry to a compromise. All the money we made above what the gun cost I could have. As I appeared incredulous, he went a step farther. I could have half the bounties on skins from his killings for the first year. That really left me still unexpected, but it held a show of victory. And, anyway, it would be no fun to stay at the house all the morning when the novel excitement of

traffic was in full blare down at the road. I assisted in carrying the baskets down to the stand, while Henry made out his scale of prices. That done, I was allowed to sit in partial concealment behind the hedge and make up "pokes" of heavy paper; Maldy had afforded us only a very meager supply of paper bags.

Mary lived on her pride in some seclusion or other and did not approach us. I was aware that I had to some degree compromised with my independence—But what of that? I could be proud any day and we couldn't have a stand at the road every day. Curiosity and interest in life conquered.

The stand was built under an osage-orange tree, allowed to grow for shade above the rest of the trimmed hedges. Henry and John arranged the glossiest of their wares tastefully upon their structure, and then everything was ready. We awaited custom. We had a point of vantage at the top of the hill, from which we could command a view of the road in each direction. It was a bare dusty way, its yellow thread of track enclosed on each side by a

stretch of weeds, now in August ripeness, wild hemp and sunflower and dog-fennel, with an occasional stretch of prairie grass not yet crowded out by the weeds of civilization.

A team approached down the neighboring hill with a wagon full of people. About the stand excitement swelled. "Now you keep back," Henry dropped over his shoulder to me, "it's a whole lot of men." The feminist crouched low behind the thickest part of the hedge. Henry and John took easy commercial attitudes at the stand. The wagon rolled on in its little yellow dust-cloud, made the slow ascent of the hill, quickened its speed as it touched the upper level, and rattled past us without a pause. Its occupants were the Bledsoes, who lived two miles beyond us and had nearly as much fruit as we did. Ikie Bledsoe waved a jeering hand at us from the rear of the wagon, where he sat with his knees doubled over the endgate, and dropped an indistinguishable remark as the horses started to trot down the other side of the hill.

Henry looked along the empty road for a few silent minutes and then sent John to get

a corn-knife and cut down the weeds in front of the stand. The sight of John's activity revived everyone's spirits. Presently an old man jogged up the hill on a ragged sorrel horse, rode up to the stand, and, after long consideration, bought a nickel's worth of peaches. The sorrel, as they turned away, snatched an apple from the stand, knocked off three others and stepped on one of them.

Two women, both in gingham sunbonnets and half-hander gloves, drove past next. They stopped and looked at our wares, but only, apparently, to see how ours compared with what they had at home, as if we were a fruit exhibit at a county fair. Henry was sober. At that moment the gun didn't look any bigger than a revolver to him.

But a long spring-wagon full of men came next, and the men made a combined purchase of thirty-five cents' worth. It was a great comfort at least to have money enough to rattle. Henry let John hold it part of the time. The next man bought a nickel's worth of grapes and then two men bought a dozen apples, haggling over the price. Then it seemed to be time

to dust the stock off and Henry sent me to the house to get one of Maldy's turkey-wings. Maldy's fortunate absence from the kitchen made it possible for me to secure one and also to sample the cookies on which Ellen was experimenting. I complimented the result very cordially and Ellen received my remarks with more than wonted graciousness and gave me a handful to take back to the road.

When I returned to the stand I found there a gloom which even the distribution of cookies did not entirely lighten. I gathered, as I wielded my turkey-wing—and found it a not very pliable or sympathetic implement—that successive vehicles had passed inattentive. Even at this moment a wagon, full to the dashboard, lumbered past, dully indifferent. Henry forgot to send me back to cover. A spring wagon followed, its occupants regaling themselves with watermelon and impassive to the outspread charms of more aristocratic fruits. A mover-wagon followed, its engulfed inhabitants also enjoying watermelon, the driver thrusting his head out from under the canvas like a turtle, to eject the seeds, and somebody in the



vague interior discarding well-cleaned rinds through the hole in the rear.

"I'll bet they stole them," said Henry acidly. Of course movers did not have the best of reputations among us.

A man coming from the other direction bought a nickel's worth of grapes to take home, and said that if his woman was there she might want a whole basketful; but that was colorless comfort to us. A wagon containing two young men and two girls and great hilarity, approached, and for sheer gallantry the young man in the back seat must treat—not too lavishly—with grapes and peaches. Our sky brightened. Conversation turned to comparison of different makes of firearms.

Now as noon drew on a pretty regular stream of vehicles began to pass—a wagon with two men on the seat in front and two women, each with a baby, on kitchen chairs behind; a second wagon with side-boards laid across them for seats, all full of people; other conveyances of the same kind, all crowded full and overflowing with sociability. They all creaked up the hill slowly, greeted by our rising hopes,

and rattled down it rapidly, pursued by our indignant disappointment. But they rarely stopped, even at the boys' shrill announcement of their wares. I remained behind the hedge continuously.

One thing began to seem strange. About half of these people were eating watermelon. The coincidence seemed more and more remarkable—that they should all have brought watermelon along and with one mind begun to eat it at this precise point. We considered the practical improbability of this. As we did so another thing came to our notice. We could always trace an oncoming wagon down the long hill opposite us, and almost into the hollow. Then a little interval would always elapse before we could see the horses' bobbing heads as they climbed the hill to our station. Now we noticed that this interval was unnecessarily long. Men did not usually rest their horses at the bottom of a hill. What were they doing? We traced a certain white and bay team down the opposite slope and into the hiatus at the bottom. Then minutes elapsed while we craned our necks at the top of the hill and waited for

the white ears and bay ears to appear in the line of the yellow track. Finally the wagon was in front of us—and the people in it were eating watermelon! We fixed our eyes on the next wagon approaching—with precisely the same resulting observation.

Henry bade John watch the stand, and raced away down the hill. John bade me do so, and followed him. An hour before I had coveted this position. Now, after a moment's hesitating obedience, I swept all the stores behind the hedge and followed John.

At the bottom of the hill we at first saw nothing unusual as we came racing up. Then, when we were opposite the big cottonwood which stood by a farm gate opening into a field, we saw. A team advanced down the other hill at the very same moment, the men behind it talking loudly and absorbedly until they reached us. Then they, too, saw and stopped. At the very foot of the cottonwood, on a small solitary patch of blue grass set among the daisy-flowered dog-fennel, were two little round piles of watermelons, their striped and blotched greenness enticing to the hungry eye. And be-

tween the two piles stood Mary, in a little blue dress, her soft, childish arms tightly clasping a big mottled green melon, around which they could barely reach. The whitish-gray trunk of the tree stretched up behind her, and its tinkling, glinting leaves sounded and shone overhead.

Mary uttered not a word as the wagon stopped. She gave one appealing look at its occupants, and then drooped her head until her loose brown hair touched the top of her green burden. Her cheeks grew pinker and pinker, and she clasped the melon tighter and tighter, but she stood her ground bravely, waiting. The men looked for a moment and then one of them called in a jolly way, "What do you want for it, sissy?"

"Only fifty cents," said Mary, shyer than ever.

The man jumped out and came to get it, and Mary relinquished her solid burden and took his two quarters in the same sedate diffidence.

"See here," demanded Henry when the wagon rolled on, "What are you doing this for?"

"I wanted to get some money to buy a bracelet," said Mary simply, looking the piles over to select another melon.

"Well, gee-whiz, how do you think we're going to make any?"

"You wouldn't give me any of yours," said Mary in the same impersonal way, wiping her new melon off with a dish-towel she had secreted neatly behind the tree.

"Well, I'd like to know what right you think you have to do this—where'd you get these melons, anyway?" he broke off, shifting his line of arraignment.

"Maldy gave them to me. She brought them down here for me," answered Mary with the same natural simplicity, a manner especially exasperating to Henry when he was in a belligerent position. When one simply told the whole truth, secreted nothing, colored nothing, defended nothing, what was there for her antagonist to attack and to continue to attack?

Henry was brought to an abrupt stop, which seemed to jolt his ideas all to pieces. "I'll bet she didn't!" he exploded.

Mary made no answer. From behind the tall

weeds which formed a thick fringe beyond the clipped hedge rose Maldy, eyeing Henry impassively.

Henry looked at our assembled forces. Mary, supported by Maldy, was invulnerable. I, of course, was on their side; John was never a very eager partizan.

Maldy's look spoke stolid triumph. "Got your gun yet?" she asked grimly.

That night when Maldy was putting us to bed—we were tired for once and willing to retire early when the notion was suggested to us—the voice of an itinerant Methodist preacher, who had timed his travels so carefully that he arrived at our house just at suppertime, kept rising to us from the porch below. The preacher had looked in at the convention on his way, and his thoughts were on politics and large matters of statecraft. He discoursed broadly of democracy, and then dropped to a detail—I missed the connection.

"Woman is the greatest moral force in the world," he said authoritatively, "——er, that is, one of the greatest, of course. The Lord

never intended her to take any part in government. She has always ruled by love and gentleness, and if she tries any other way she will lose her priceless influence."

"Huuf!" said Maldy, as she tucked Mary in. Then she went clumping down the stairs to cut a watermelon and distribute it on the porch.

Left alone, Mary lay quiet a long time, in her still little way. Then she suddenly sat up in her bed. "Barbara," she said, "I am going to give you and Henry and John some of my money. I'm sorry about Henry."

## THE SCRAP-BOOKS

I DON'T know for what purpose a large box of bound volumes of *Reports* of proceedings of Agricultural and Horticultural Societies was sent to our house every year as regularly as the seasons came, causing an annual sigh from my mother and something more articulate and more expressive from Maldy. For they had to be kept somewhere—the professional wail of the housekeeper—and dusted and moved, until with the passing of time they were supplanted by another set and were carried to the attic to make room for later *Proceedings*. I suppose that our place was a headquarters for something or a distributing station of some sort. I have vague recollections of seeing the volumes offered to rather surprised and dubiously consenting neighbors and other farmers who happened along. But even after a conscientious effort to distribute them, there was always a dreary and futile remainder left on our hands



to be carried up to the attic and there, except for one use, to fall into dusty oblivion.

From our point of view the books were quite unreadable and almost pitifully useless. A book that couldn't be read was an abject thing. We were sorry for the men whom we saw carrying them away; for their disappointment and that of their children when they should open the books at home and find what they really contained. Year after year we looked into them in the hope that we should eventually find *something*. It didn't seem possible that so many books should be published with absolutely nothing in them. But such meager expectation as we had was always disappointed.

To begin with, they were, even when new, dreary, dun-colored books, the art of some official printer. They were full of pictures, and that was promising, for naturally one expects the presence of pictures to indicate literature of the lighter sort. But such pictures as they were when you came to look at them! Common bugs in all stages of unbeautiful growth; worms only less ugly than in life; hens, mere hens, standing up to have their pictures taken;

and machinery and other stuff not worth detailing. You opened up a nice, shiny infolded sheet, evidently intended in creation for a beautiful picture, and found it held only drawings of windmills or churns. There were colored plates of acute pericarditis, looking a good deal like a Sunday roast, and a faithful representation of *Sclerostoma Syngamus* and of *Phyllostreata Zimmermanii* and three forms of *Agrotis*, whatever that may be. There were fanciful diagrams of statistics, looking a good deal like a time-table run wild. The amazing artists of these books could make things look like what they never were. Red clover, when pictured by them, looked like a rabbit's head and an aster like a block of patchwork from a quilt.

That was our first acquaintance with science. We did not think much of it. Nothing looked or sounded as we knew it. Our respect for big words vanished before these. There was *Pachyta Octomulata*, for instance—what if that should get into the spelling book! We deprecated the foolishness of turning the natural

names of things—which of course had existed first—into these mouthfuls of letters.

It is easily to be seen that no entertainment was to be drawn from such books as these. Even when the agriculturists broke into verse, as they sometimes did, the result was worse than negligible. It was really surprising that men could think it worth while to waste print on such matter as all this—they must have wanted tremendously to make a book. And some books are so interesting. You have no conception of what an irritating tragedy it was to have a box of books arrive, always an event, and to have an incommunicative parent open the box at our impatient demand, and to get the first volume coaxed out of its secure pocket and tear off the paper covering with excited fingers and find—an *Agricultural Report!*—and then to discover that the grown-ups had known it all the time.

But there was one function by which these despised works partly redeemed their useless existence. They made scrap-books. I don't know where a child gets its impulse to make a scrap-book or why it does so. It seems to be

following some unidentified rudimentary motive. We never read in ours after they were made; at least if we did so it was a last resort for entertainment. We didn't regard them with even the pride which naturally follows any act of creation. But we seemed to feel it laid on us to preserve the literature of newspapers and magazines from utter oblivion by entombing it in the sarcophagus of a scrap-book. I think each of us had at least one to his credit annually.

The building of them was an occupation that was much encouraged by the authorities on rainy days. We rarely had a hoard of clippings ready for literary embalming, but, equipped with scissors, a paste-bowl prepared by the grumbling Maldy, a stack of old periodicals and newspapers, and the *Agricultural Reports*, we were ready to spend the afternoon in saving literature for the world. We frequently read through the bits we were going to preserve, but when one is doing such a piece of work on a wholesale plan one can't stop to read everything that goes in. It is better to save it first and read it afterward. The puz-

zling questions which arose were rather mechanical than literary. It was really less important to get pieces of literary merit than to get those which would fit the page neatly. Some quite meritorious periodicals had columns of a width that was unadaptable to the page of the *Agricultural Report*, and their prose at least had to be discarded altogether.

Many difficult question were to be decided. In the first place, when four persons are making scrap-books at once, the problem of primary and proprietary rights arises often. Henry didn't care for poetry, but when it came to making a scrap-book he wanted as much as anyone; and that did not seem fair in a person who always voted for prose when some one was going to read aloud to us. A hazy aunt somewhere subscribed for *Our Young Soldiers* for John. Except for the pleasure of having it come addressed to him, he did not care much for it, and generously allowed us to read it freely. He even saw it destroyed with equanimity. But on these occasion he claimed everything usable in it, and only flung us the hacked and rifled remains. Besides these mat-

ters, the constantly arising question of who had chosen pieces first added the liveliness of an economic struggle to what would otherwise have been a purely academic pursuit.

Then there was the perplexing difficulty of choosing between articles inconveniently set on opposite sides of the page. Which should be saved for immortality and which should be lost forever in the pasty act of adhesion? In addition to that, there were continual decisions as to order and arrangement, and the nice management which brought everything out even at the bottom of the page. Mary, with her customary readiness of device, filled in her inch or half-inch spaces with miscellaneous obituary notices. It didn't matter if she didn't know the people, she said; they were dead just the same. John usually supplied such gaps with recipes from the Home Departments, because he could always find one the right length. When we jeered at him for getting outside of his masculine sphere, which in our notion was strictly defined, he acknowledged soberly that he had not read them, but thought that if he ever got married this would save buying a cook book.

Anyway, the practical convenience of the contrivance could not be questioned. For me, I prided myself on making things come out even, or on finding a bit of verse in the *Gems of Thought* column to eke out with. It seemed more ornamental and literary than recipes or obituary notices, and I was all for the literary thing.

It will thus be seen that when one settled down to the making of a scrap-book it became an absorbing occupation. Those *Agricultural Reports* did not exist entirely in vain, although the form of their contribution to literature was one undreamed of by their perpetrators. It was rather unfortunate that a wandering Secretary of Agriculture or some such official came in upon us one day when we were in the midst of this vicarious literary activity. I was trying painfully to decide between an attractive-looking piece of poetry, exactly the length of a column in my book, on one side of a page in the *Farm World*, and the neat, solid paragraphs of a discussion of the decay of the Grange and the vices of middlemen on the other. John, sticky to his eyebrows, was cutting out and

trimming off a poem to fit a vacant space, impartially clipping off the last words on the outstanding ends of the longer lines; and Henry and Mary, on their knees on the floor, were busily wielding their oozy paste swabs. A heap of discarded leaves from our four books lay among the old newspapers, and we were all in the state of blissful absorption in which *They* loved best to see us on a muddy day.

At that point Maldy, the all-knowing and authoritative, rushed in upon us, commanding us to put away and clear up immediately. But she was too late and we were too much bewildered by her suddenness to take prompt action. Almost at the same moment my father entered with this important stranger. And there sat we four on the carpet, each with a mutilated *Report* in hand. Perhaps he was the very one who had written the article on *Pachyta Octomulata*. And of course he could not know that these books had already lain in the attic three years waiting to be used. However, he was a man of self-control, as all officials and candidates must be, and confined his agricultural passion for the moment to politic remarks on



the young olive branches before him. Or perhaps his opinion of the *Reports* did not differ much from ours. We, after this first notice was over, returned to our paste pots, all unaware of the inappropriateness of our occupation. Maldy, since the worst had happened, quit frowning at us from her station in the depths of the dining-room and returned to the kitchen.

I said that we made up our scrap-books out of whole cloth. We did usually, but I acknowledge that I, who perhaps worshiped at my literary shrines with a warmer devotion than the others, often had a hoard all ready to begin upon. I was always staying Maldy's none too patient hand just at the moment when she was taking a newspaper to start a fire or to cover a shelf, in order that I might rescue some bit of poetry from such unnatural fate. When the time came to have a general pasting, I unearthed rumpled and frayed clippings from boxes and pockets and books. That threw me a little behind the others in getting a share out of the common stock, but I flattered myself that my selections had finer sentiment and more

purely literary flavor than theirs. Mary, too, sometimes had a few scraps on hand, but hers, as will be seen, were selected with a different motive.

Of course one can't expect to find as good poetry in newspapers as in books. Even in one's earliest reading of newspapers one discovers that. But once in a while I found in a newspaper something out of a book, qualified by the fine atmosphere given it by its association. I can't tell the feeling of getting such a poem, by a rare chance one of Tennyson's perhaps, into the pages of my scrap-book. Of course one could find *Maud Muller* or *A Psalm of Life* in the upper right-hand corner of a newspaper page almost any day—but Tennyson! I tried setting *Break, Break, Break* in the middle of a page all by itself when I found it, since it seemed enough for the glory of one leaf; but I didn't admire the effect of the wide margin of statistics about fall wheat and spring wheat which were left to set it off.

I didn't greatly love Shakespeare as yet, but I thought it my duty to preserve from dishonorable neglect any stray bits I found in the

newspapers. That was merely a duty. There were other acts of the same kind which were a sort of religious joy, as when I found a scrap of *Lalla Rookh* or *The Vision of Sir Launfal* set, in out-of-place brightness, on the prosaic sheet of a farm paper, among lucubrations of veterinary science and discussions as to whether cows should be milked twice or three times a day. These things I rescued as brands from a sacrilegious burning, and saved them to shed a light from another world on the too modern pages of my scrap-book. A poem from a book became peculiarly mine when I found it thus detached and gathered it into my possessions.

I don't know when we discontinued this form of entertainment. Henry outgrew it first of course, and supplanted it with less literary pursuits. A relative gave me a real scrap-book, with columns of bias mutilated lines which did away with the paste-bowl, and in effect laid it on me to choose carefully and economically the matter that was to be perpetuated in its orderly pages. Long after even Mary had ceased to make *Agricultural Reports*

into scrap-books I searched through the house for samples of them. I thought there must be dozens of them, remembering our activity and the numberless new starts we made, when we tired of the mussiness or the material of the old ones and wanted to begin afresh on a new plan.

But Maldy seemed to have disposed of all the old ones in her zealous destruction of the unnecessary, and I found none but one of Mary's, whether her last or not, I don't know. I suppose it was a fair representative of them all, and that Henry's and John's and mine were all put together on the same literary principles. But I doubt if any of us had such a funny little assortment as Mary. Mary was a moral soul always, as evidenced by her choice of obituary notices as literary material. It was Mary who introduced moral issues into everyday life, and mixed matters of conscience and matters of pleasant inclination in a most annoying manner. When we dramatized sections of the *Book of Martyrs* for our own light entertainment, Mary always elected to be the martyr, to the complete satisfaction of everyone else. The

rest of us preferred to be persecutors; the rôle offered greater activity and more natural motives. On days of reckoning, such as come in the best of families, unless there was glaring and unasked evidence against Mary, she was excused on *a priori* grounds, a judgment that often led to her momentary unpopularity.

To one who knew Mary thoroughly her scrapbook was not a surprise. Her gleanings seemed to be taken largely from Sunday-school papers and from the *Family Circle* page or *Our Young People* in the church papers. No false prejudice as to the names of authors or their factitious reputation guided her in her choice. The first three poems were entitled respectively *Phussandphrett*, a pleasant combination of allegory and protest against phonetic spelling, *Pull the Weeds*, and *Revenue on Rum*, all of them titles of a beautiful clarity. Besides these there were *Signs of Rain*, *A Noble Stand*, *Lost Jewels*, *A Very Intelligent Bird*—a dialogue with Bob-White on certain industrial problems, slightly intelligent—*Papa's Lesson*, *True Temperance*, *Contentment*, beginning "Once on a time an old red hen," and pages

more of the same kind. *Katie Lee and Willie Gray* made a romantic oasis among them. There never was a scrap-book without Katie and Willie. I must have made beginnings of half a dozen in my time, and every one of them contained that happy syncopation of life and domestic polity.

The prose was equally edifying; *Success, What It Is and How to Win It, Right and Wrong Ambition, If I Were a Girl*, a complete sermon of Talmage's on *The Marriage Ring*, evidently chosen for the long, even sides of its columns. It made three beautiful pages. I don't know why Mary didn't put in more of Talmage's sermons.

But she did not confine herself to the purely didactic. Fiction was represented in *The Nutting Party*, an innocent tale of how Mattie and Ethel and Rosie went out and got some nuts and brought them home, in a sprightly story beginning, "Good morning! Good morning! How is the invalid this fine morning?" and in many "True Incidents" of one sort and another. I always avoided true incidents myself, having much greater respect for invention.

Then, not to restrict herself too closely to *belles lettres*, she went into science and general information in *The Chameleon and Its Habits*, *Sacred Bathing Places*, *Chaldean Coffins*, illustrated—Mary probably thought these were religious pieces—a dramatic account of the history of Lady Jane Gray in dialogue form, *Flamingoes* and *Alaskan Burial Customs*, also illustrated.

There was an extended account of Grant's death, with the big black heading, *Death Conquers All*, and heavy black lines along each column, carefully preserved by Mary in cutting out. Mary was no doubt proud of those lines, and they really did make a beautiful page, which the rest of us probably envied her. There was an account of Queen Victoria with her picture, and—to treat royalty impartially—a companion picture of the king of Siam. There were other pictures equally alluring, one entitled *Cromwell Dissolving the Long Parliament*, with a stamping and flourishing Cromwell and cowering Parliamentarians scuttling to cover.

Finally, as if to prove beyond question her catholic taste, Mary's instinct had led her to

choose some of those results of genius in which literary form and didactic purpose are aptly combined. She had rhymes and acrostics to teach the ten commandments, the kings of England, or even physiological rule. One of these happy works began,

A—s soon as you're up shake blanket and sheet,  
B—etter be without shoes than sit with wet feet,

and so on. And a purely literary one rendered Dickens into,

A is for Agnes, so sweet and true and kind,  
B is for poor Barnaby, with clouds upon his mind,

and on through

P is for Pickwick, a friend to young and old,  
Q is for Quilp, a villain strong and bold,

to

W is for Weller, e'er to his master true.

It seemed to be an attempt to show that though novels these works were quite of the type of the Sunday-school library story and perfectly safe reading.



Mary's scrap-book would have pleased the pedagogical Mr. Day, of *Sandford and Merton*. I think it is just the kind he would have had Henry prepare; only he would have had more about flamingoes and Chaldean funerals.

I can't remember what I thought of Mary's scrap-books, but I am sure that I must have looked upon them with the sense of meritorious superiority which only the exalted assurance of finer literary taste can give one. Mine must have looked a good deal like hers, except that of course it would not be so neat. But mine had mental rubrications and little halos, invisible to any eye but my own, around certain names of those to whom I had given literary canonization. Of course there were other names also, uncanonized and unhaloed, and long, unrubricated sections. I, too, had borrowings from *Selected*, and I don't think that I was above Talmage's sermons, always at hand on the patent side of the county papers. And I remember a long series of *Letters to a Young Daughter*, which gave me many pages of combined neatness and good counsel, fine as Mary's own.

But that new book, with its beautiful gummed lines and its red binding, almost put the making of scrap-books on a new plane and forbade the use of inferior material, sermons or not. Still, I never showed that book to anyone, especially after I saw my father open it one night and smile. He showed it to my mother, and she smiled a little, too, though she said nothing, and presently looked to see what I was reading. It never seemed to me fair for grown people to smile at children when the children didn't know what they were smiling at—though of course with one's mother it is different.

After that I took the book and put it away. If my mother smiled it was a sign that I had better not let Henry see it, even though a stolen glimpse at Ellen's had given me a suggestion for my choice. That collection was made the summer I investigated Romance and read poems of passion. I shouldn't care to tell even now all that was in that scrap-book.

## IVY OF THE NEGATIVES

MALDY was away for the afternoon. That was a very rare thing, for Maldy clung to the place as if it were a citadel left to her guarding. She held all visiting in contempt—partly because of her own long experience with visitors—and as for her scanty shopping, she summarily relegated that to my mother, her only requirements in garments being that they should wear well and should look just like her last ones. But at one point my mother demurred. She would not buy Maldy's shoes—so she said after a few experiments—and have her hobbling around in toe-pinching or heel-rubbing foot-leather. So twice a year, after Maldy's needs had for many days been pointed out to her, she, with many postponements and great final reluctance, went to town with my mother. This was one of those occasions.

She had looked back many times before she

was out of sight, and we, out of sheer kindness to her, had maintained a virtuous state of conspicuous idleness on the front porch as long as she could see us. It would be a comforting vision for her to carry with her to the unacceptable experiences of the afternoon.

With Mally out of sight and a change of atmosphere, we immediately relaxed. Meditation fell upon us. We were not really casting about for anything lawless to do; but still so rare an occasion as this deserved some unwonted employment. It would be unappreciative and tame not to use it appropriately. Uneasiness sat even on Henry, while we all tacitly and inactively awaited a worthy inspiration.

Our meditation was interrupted by the appearance of Ivy Hixon, the daughter of one of the renters, coming on one of her borrowing errands. I had heard my father say that the Hixons were practical Socialists; I don't know what he meant, but it was obviously connected with borrowing customs. Ivy now carried a black-cracked tea-cup in her hand.

"Mom wanted to know would your ma borrow her some saleratus," she delivered herself.

Questioning revealed that she wanted some baking soda. I arose with as good an imitation of my mother's air as I could manage, and led the way into the house. Mary followed us, and finally John. Henry, who found no delight in the freckled Ivy, and had in fact compared her appearance to that of a grass-burr, sent an indifferent glance after us and then took himself off to the stables. For Henry the company of horses never staled.

In the big storeroom of the kitchen—a mere pantry could not hold stores for a household of our numbers—we found the soda, and with as many manners as I could take on I gave Ivy a liberal helping.

Ivy lingered to look around. “You’ve got lots of things to eat,” she said.

That had never seemed to me a cause for pride, but I tried to look affluent. However, I thought it better to edge Ivy back into the kitchen. My mother never talked to the renter women about the things we had. But even in the kitchen Ivy found much to comment on and linger over. I was uneasy at first; my mother was full of kindly attentions to the renter fam-

ilies, but the children never came to the house much. However, that prohibition appeared to belong to Maldy's administration, and to allow Ivy to remain for a while seemed to be a privilege of the day. Soon we were all talking freely and enjoying Ivy's admiration of the number and size of our kitchen utensils. She applauded the kitchen stove especially. Maldy's stove was no doubt a thing to admire, although at that time, not having the housekeeping point of view, we did not realize its praiseworthiness.

A fire had been left, in Maldy's hasty after-dinner departure. Even its heat, as we assisted Ivy to admire it, seemed of a peculiarly efficient sort. Assuming technical knowledge, we displayed dampers and drafts and oven depths. Ivy looked appreciatively into the still warm oven.

"Mom made a cake onst," she said, "when Uncle Jake's folks come."

It was not for us to speak of cakes.

"Can you cook?" she asked me.

"Some," I answered conservatively. I had

once mixed up corn-bread under Maldy's impatient direction.

"I can fry side-meat and potatoes and make saleratus biscuits."

We had learned that renters lived chiefly on hot biscuit; when I add that they called bread "*light-bread*" always, I have sufficiently indicated their social standing in our eyes.

"We could make a cake right now," said Ivy. She spoke as one suggesting an enterprise, but a merely natural one to undertake. I was silent, as of course Mary was also.

Said John in a moment, "Let's make a cake." John had no culinary self-respect to preserve. Anyway, he was thinking less of the adventure than of the desirable result.

"You put eggs in it, and milk and lots of sugar and flour and butter if you got it and lard if you ain't," said Ivy glibly. "I bet you folks got all them things."

"Oh, yes," I answered hastily. "We've got everything."

That seemed to be acquiescence, and we stood somehow committed to the undertaking. Any-

how, adventure, the more lawless the better, had been calling to us.

However, Ivy Hixon was not going to dictate to us in our own kitchen. Having made the suggestion, her officiousness expanded and threatened to take control of us all. I prepared to assert myself.

“You beat the eggs first,” said Ivy; “Mom took three.”

While I considered, Mary, the methodical, climbed to a shelf and brought down a cook-book. The possession of a cook-book was merely a concession to convention on Maldy’s part, for she was never seen to use it and had been heard to speak contemptuously of it. Mary’s little forefinger traveled down the index column to cakes.

“There’s a good many,” she said. “What kind do we want? Here’s Brown Stone Front and Nancy Hanks and Five Egg and Good White Cake and Jelly Cake and Chocolate Layer and Marble and Fairy Lily——”

“Let’s have that,” I said.

Mary turned to it. “Whites of seven eggs, cup and a half of sugar,” she began.



"What do you do with the yolks?" I interrupted. I had supposed that an egg was a unit in cooking.

Mary laboriously followed through the list of items and figures. "It don't say," she said.

"Mom put 'em in," said Ivy. "Mom's cake was yallow. It wasn't no lily cake," she finished contemptuously. With the advent of the cook-book authority seemed likely to slip from her. "Mom put three whole eggs in hern."

"Let's make a big cake," said John.

"Read the five-egg one," I dictated.

"Five eggs beaten separately——" began Mary.

"That's awful funny," said Ivy. We all looked dubious, in fact.

Mary finished out the proportions of the cake, conventional enough, I suppose. The final statement that the recipe would make a very large cake was decisive for everyone.

"All right," I said briskly. I really was not, for my part, eager for the result, but the situation began to please me. "John, you fix up the fire, and don't take Maldy's cobs. Mary, we've got to wash our hands first." That was not

sheer virtue; a look at Ivy's had suggested it. Ivy joined us in common ablution, and, I think, saw the complexion of her hands for the first time in many a day.

"We must clean our finger-nails," added Mary gently, to my surprise. Ivy plainly thought that unnecessary, but followed suit, matching the novel enterprise from her own experience, however, with, "Mom digs out the baby's nails sometimes."

But, that concession to elegance over, Ivy quickly resumed her place again. I turned from the towel to find her setting out a flat crock for a mixing bowl, a row of five tea-cups, and a fork.

"What are those for?" I asked.

"To beat the eggs in. The book says so."

I had never seen a process like that, and was doubtful; but still many an operation went on in the kitchen on which I did not trouble to cast my eye. I was not in a position to contradict, but I tried at least to awe Ivy by reaching down an egg-beater instead of the fork. Ivy looked at it a moment, tested its movement and, unimpressed, accepted it as a matter of course. She

hung over the cook-book, business in her mien, energy radiating from her elbows. Nature had dealt but meagerly with Ivy. Her hair was sandy—sandy to the touch, I fancied—her face was sandy, her hands looked sandy. Her dress, to my embarrassment, was an old one of my own; I tried to act unconscious of the fact. It hung loosely from her round shoulders and—although she was nearly as old as I—was far too long for her; but, as she was barefooted, that was a good thing. Her scratched feet looked sandy, too. Her hair was tied with a white string, which was braided in for two or three inches from the end. I had suggested that means of security to Ellen when she braided my hair, but she did not accept the suggestion, although it would doubtless have saved me many a reproof. Whether because of this device or not, Ivy's scrawny little braid turned sharply outward from her meager shoulders and, with her quick, jerky movements, bobbed about like a question mark incessantly questioning. Before we got through with our enterprise that curled-up arc of hair

seemed to me to be making the cake, it was so active, so ubiquitous.

Ivy turned briskly from the cook-book and disappeared into the storeroom. She was back almost instantly.

"Say, there ain't but six eggs, and if we'd take them they'd know for sure. You go out and get some more. I bet they's a plenty."

Dignity compelled me to pass the order on to John. Assuming initiative, I proceeded to get out the other ingredients, but always with Ivy at my elbow, making additional suggestions. "When you're gettin' get a plenty. That's what Aunt Em says. But Mom says when you ain't got any money—— Say, ain't you folks got lots of sugar! Say, you could have cake every day."

Her eyes saw every article in the storeroom, and her tongue commented without trammel. Between times she issued orders with freedom and decision. I was always just going to, but Ivy steadily forestalled me. It seemed as if, whenever I turned to do a thing, Ivy's arc of braid was always bobbing just ahead of me. Information which I imparted to her became

her own as completely as if it had never been mine. Within a few minutes she knew all the household equipment as well as Mary and I put together. It need not be supposed that I acquiesced readily in this system of precedence, but when there is no crevice in the front of authority where one can interpose opposition, and when one is hampered by hospitality besides, where is one going to begin to assert her independence?

The mixing spoon was hardly ever out of Ivy's hands. She stirred and beat and sifted and stirred, in a housewifely ecstasy of creation. The words "a plenty" rolled lusciously on her tongue constantly when she caught sight of our household stores. Only steady self-control kept her from altering the proportion of ingredients when abundance of butter or sugar came into view. It seemed a pity not to use more when there was "a plenty." Her imagination reached forward, and she hinted at something else to be done when the cake was off our hands. But this time even John did not rise to the suggestion.

I should not have supposed that one person

could find sufficient orders for three. I found myself obeying in a sort of bewilderment. Mary was kept busy washing dishes, because, as Ivy said, the elders would not want to find the kitchen "all gaumed up when they come back." It did seem wise to remove our traces. The eggs were beaten separately—that is, individually—and the process took some time. John thought it unnecessary, but Ivy overruled him with the words of the book. For one of comparatively limited acquaintance with literature, Ivy had remarkable reverence for the printed word. She seemed to take pride in having cooking thus connected with her stunted accomplishment of reading.

At last everything was in, stirred and beaten, and beaten and stirred. Everybody, even John, had been allowed to take a hand at this; but it was Ivy's freckled little arms which gave the last loving strokes. At this moment Henry strolled in.

We had got so used to Ivy that we had forgotten to miss Henry. But John, going out to find another egg to replace one which somebody had dropped on the floor—we regretted it, but

Ivy said there were plenty more—had mentioned to Henry that an enterprise was afoot within. After a little time for consideration, Henry decided to enter. He came loafing in, his hands in his pockets and a general air of mature leisure about him. I had just got out a cake-pan and Ivy had taken it from me and was buttering it with flying whisks of her fingers. She was putting a good deal of butter on it.

Henry eyed the process a moment with remotely critical air. I think it was the first time he had noticed the operation at all, but it was for him to suggest improvement, now that he was here.

“You’re putting too much butter on that,” he said briefly, without introduction.

Ivy paused and looked at him, every freckle darting out surprise. She rubbed her nose with the back of her hand and eyed him above her buttery fingers.

“You never made no cake,” she answered.

“Cake shouldn’t taste of butter,” said Henry, speaking calmly but succinctly, as an

expert authority. "It'll make it fall," he added.

Ivy, determined not to be impressed, continued to eye him as she ran her fingers round and round the pan. Henry took one hand from its pocket, lifted the mixing-spoon and let the batter drip from it while he scrutinized the compound intelligently.

"It's too thin," he delivered judgment.

"It's just like the book says, I guess," returned Ivy forcibly. Ivy was really misnamed. We were all responsible for the cake, but Ivy seemed to be its natural defender.

His attention called to the cook-book, Henry turned to peruse it. He wore the air of a passing authority who had no personal interest in pointing out error. He did not keep us waiting long, however, before he spoke again.

"Lots of cake have raisins in them. Let's put raisins in this."

Let *us*! Even we who knew Henry well had never seen him adopt an exploit with greater promptness. But then we were used to Henry; many a time had he gathered us to his banner



as sheep to a cause. Ivy alone found him a novelty.

“The book never said nothin’ about puttin’ in no raisins,” she said. “This ain’t that kind of cake.”

With the air of one who was bloodied but spiritually unbowed, she stirred the cake again and bade me look at the fire. A few minutes before she would have given the order to John. Whether she acknowledged it or not, masculinity seemed to be in a stage of readjustment.

Mary, returning from obeying Henry’s order, reported that there were no raisins in store. It was embarrassing to us to admit that there was anything we did not have. Henry considered. Was there a substitute? He detained the putting of the cake into the oven, with a glance and a wave of the hand, while he meditated.

“Raisins are nothing but grapes,” mused John, “but grapes aren’t ripe yet.”

Henry turned his eye on the window. The rest of us indicated the stages of our mental processes by discussion. Henry merely announced his results.

"We'll get some cherries," he said.

Ivy, who had been impatiently heeling and toeing beside the kitchen table, burst forth, "I never heard of no cherries in no cake. I bet they'd spoil it."

"They'll make it thicker," said Henry, conceding a reply to her evident depth of feeling.

Ivy continued to stand by the table, smoothing and patting the surface of her cherished cake, while Henry marshaled the rest of us out to the Early Richmond cherry-trees. As a precaution he added her to the party, although she declared that the cake would fall while we were gone.

It took only a few minutes, though, for the five of us to gather and seed a quart or more of cherries. Henry dumped the lot, reeking juice, into the batter and stirred them in.

"It's thinner'n ever," wailed Ivy, "and it looks like all git out."

Henry scrutinized it carefully. "It isn't any thinner, but it's too thin yet. We'll get some more cherries."

This time we got two quarts. Henry stirred them in.

Another wail broke from Ivy. "It's thinner'n ever," she almost sobbed. "You've done and spoiled it."

"You didn't put flour enough into this," said Henry. "That's what's the matter."

"We put all the book said," I answered. Between grief and wrath Ivy was almost beyond speech.

"Well, it takes more of some kinds than others. I guess this is a thin kind."

We put in three more cups of flour, while Ivy stood in the background, a mute angry spirit of protest. When the flour was all in we each inserted—not the first time—a finger at the edge of the batter and tasted our compound. It tasted queer and floury. Ivy frankly made a face.

"You didn't put enough sugar in this," said Henry. "Cakes take a lot of sugar."

"We put in all the book said," we answered once more.

"It ain't sweet enough," said Henry, tasting again. "We'll put in more sugar."

We put in two more cups of sugar. The batter was now almost running over the crock, and

needed very careful stirring. The cake-pan which had been ready before, was now out of the question. Henry found a small dishpan, and bade me grease it. Mary washed the other and put it away. John made up the fire once more, and the cake went into the oven. We thought it polite to offer Ivy the crock to scrape, but she briefly declined it. Half an hour before each of us had had an eye on that crock, but now no one cared for it. Mary washed it and put it away. She also washed up the table and everything else, and as far as we could see there was nothing to tell the tale of us except the cake in the oven.

At the end of ten minutes, as the cake did not seem to be near baked, we settled down in various ways. No further enterprise seemed desirable. We really wished that Ivy would go home, but, as she did not seem inclined to do so, I read her *Ali Baba*. She interrupted occasionally to say, "I bet that ain't never happened." Her attitude surprised me; I did not mind its apparent discourtesy, but I did not see why anyone should demand fact in a narrative.

Any occupation we had on hand was inter-

rupted frequently while we looked into the oven. Mary took a doll and went about some serious maternal business. The rest of us collectively looked into the oven every three minutes. If that cake had ever intended to do itself credit, it lost its chance through the embarrassment of our steady watching. As it was, the baking process was curious. We watched eagerly for the moment of rising, but it never came. It did once break its temporary shell to spout up on the middle with a small geyser-like formation, distinguished from the hopeless depression of the rest of the surface. After that it sank and sank until it seemed likely to go through the bottom of the oven. The substance of the whole was of such a consistency that it would have taken a chemical analysis to tell whether it was baked or not. Like other Benjamin Wests, we nearly decimated the newest broom for straws—each of us used several each time we opened the oven door—but every time we withdrew them, gummy and unpalatable.

Time was wearing rapidly away. *They* might be home at any moment. Ivy declined

any further tales and crouched steadfastly by the oven door.

At last the cake began to recede from the sides of the pan, and Henry, returning from a brief visit to his pony, announced that it was all drying up and must be taken out immediately. Anticipation swelled among us. We forgot to watch the drive. Eagerness secured a burnt hand for each of us. But at last the cake was transferred from the oven to the kitchen table. One last problem arose. How did one take a cake from the pan? The natural thing seemed to be to take it by the little knob in the center and lift it out. That proved unsuccessful. Henry and Ivy each had a theory; it is needless to say that Henry's was to be tried first, even over Ivy's final protest.

"Now you all stand back," Henry was saying, as he selected a knife, "and I'll——"

Voices and wheels were heard outside. We looked at each other in consternation—consternation quite out of proportion to the offence. Panic fell upon us. Henry snatched up the cake, pan and all, and with his usual quickness of resource made for the regions of the

kitchen garden, which lay near. It was on the other side of the house from the drive, and was screened from it by some lilac bushes. At the very nearest place to the house a bit of soft, fine-delved ground lay waiting a later sowing of something, turnips probably. Henry seized a hoe which was conveniently at hand, made a hole in the soft earth, and in an instant that cake, with all its promise unfulfilled and its suspense still unanswered, was in its tomb. The dishpan was thrown to a convenient place under the lilac bushes and, the whole affair cleared up, we turned back to welcome the home-comers with as interested an air as if we had spent the afternoon merely waiting for their return.

Ivy had stood looking on at the interment as if she were the embodiment of all possible mourners. Tragedy sat on her brow, and grief trembled on her lips. The moment anticipated all the afternoon was snatched from her as the child of her hands went under the soil. Even her braid had uncurled itself and hung straight and pendulous as any braid. As we turned away, I had a glimpse of pursed-up lips and

hard-winking eyes, and I suspected that a tear fell on the unworthy grave of that cherry cake, the first and last of its kind.

For us it was all over. We should have liked to see how that cake tasted; but Maddy always got an unusually good supper when she came back from town, as if to show her scorn of all she had seen in her absence. Anyway, we had had doubts about the cake from the first. I never had believed that we could make a cake, even when we were doing it.

As we went into the house again, everybody eagerly assisting in carrying in the packages—with surreptitious squeezes and fingerings to help surmises as to contents—I saw Ivy darting homeward through the orchard. Her braid hopped up and down on her shoulders, and her slim skirt wrapped and flapped about her thin legs. The impetuosity of her movement suggested more than mere hurry, I thought, remembering certain impassioned moments of my own.

The evening went off very well, considering everything. After my mother had been away for a whole afternoon, we always had a very



good time in the evening, and were allowed to sit up a little later than usual. And yet I went to bed with a sense of something impending. Certain matters had already called for remark. Henry explained that we had the fire on in order to have it ready when they came home. Such thoughtfulness should have brought out approbation, but Maldy made no comment. As for the cup of soda—well, Ivy Hixon had come for it, but why she went away without it no one knew. Maldy was no questioner, I will say that for her. But she went about the kitchen that evening with a roving eye, which promised no good for us. Our sin, which had seemed mild in the beginning, hardly equal to the occasion in fact, began to assume the appalling proportions of a crime. I went to bed meditating confession.

Mary lay still for a while in her usual little fashion, and then went off to sleep. Our room was at the back of the house, and I could hear Maldy moving about below, setting all ready for the morning. Who knew what she might be discovering? Had we put away the flour-sifter and closed the sugar-bin and restored the

baking-powder to its place? I followed her movements in my imagination, picturing what she was looking at. Her steps seemed to grow heavier and more portentous. What was she seeing now?

Even when everything grew quiet underneath, I still listened for signs to reassure or terrorize. I sat up in bed embracing my knees, while my strained attention was fixed below. But everything was so silent down there that my alertness finally relaxed and my eyes wandered to the moon-lighted spaces below my window. Even the corner of the kitchen garden, which I could see, had a sort of agreeableness, with the moonlight and the moon-made shadows upon it. I mused a while, watching the glorified lawn, and finally, with elbows on knees and chin on hands, began to make up a story about what I was going to do when I was twenty.

Suddenly I sprang from the bed and ran to the window. Out in that garden corner someone was moving. I couldn't see very plainly at first, but undoubtedly there was a moving figure there. How had Maldy ever discovered?

But as I looked I saw that it was Ivy's. She was groping around for the hoe we had used in the afternoon. I was indignant. Of course somebody would see her—and then! She did not find the hoe, and stood for a moment undecided. Then she dropped to her knees and began to dig away at the soft earth with her hands. I condemned her entirely. She had got us into this, and now she was going to get us caught. And digging up cake out of the ground, too! I felt contempt.

A step sounded heavily on the porch below. Maldy always walked with a curious unbending tread. She stalked straight out by the path and around by the lilac bushes. Now Ivy Hixon *had* done it! She, too, heard by this time, and sat back on her heels to listen. Thus she was when Maldy rounded the lilacs and came upon her. Then she jumped up with a cry. I was almost sorry for her then, for I knew Maldy's summary handling of the renter children. Still, Ivy had brought this on herself.

Maldy questioned abruptly and gruffly, standing with her hands on her hips and her elbows

squared. Ivy answered, her speech all running together, until it ended in a high little wail, with a tragic gesture toward the ground at her feet. Maldy questioned further, her attitude tentative. Ivy answered again, her voice each time running up to its pathetic little cry at the end, and her hands making their tragic movement. This was not the effective Ivy of the afternoon. I could imagine her ending with, "And I never got none of it!" To my relief, however, Maldy seemed to be relaxing. She spoke briefly but with reserve.

Presently she turned toward the house, Ivy following her, evidently at her bidding. Ivy waited on this side of the lilac bushes, not far from my window, while Maldy went into the kitchen to get the cracked cup and the soda, I supposed. I really was relieved, though not on Ivy's account alone.

Maldy returned, her bearing still amicable. But what was this she was bringing? The cup of soda, to be sure, and with it the remnant of the fresh sponge cake she had beaten up for supper—and a piece of *fruit cake*! I nearly fell out of the window as it came to view. Fruit

cake was Maldy's choicest and best-concealed treasure. I suspected that even my mother asked her permission to use it. It was the top-most crown of our rarest social occasions. Maldy seemed always to have some, but we never caught her making it. When I have said that we never even asked her for it, I have said all.

She was giving it to Ivy. She said, "Don't you eat this to-night, but you put it away and have it some time." Then she relapsed into her renter-children tone, "Now you better go right along home. Don't be hanging around here." Ivy went, cutting across the lawn and down through the shadowy orchard spaces. Her disposing of the sponge cake as she went did not seem to interfere with her speed.

The next morning Henry himself slipped the dishpan down to the yards and washed it in the watering-trough. Unfortunately Maldy was in the kitchen when he cautiously brought it in, and her eye required an explanation of him.

"Why, I took this out yesterday to pick cherries in," he began.

“Huuf,” said Maldy, and turned her back on him. She gave the dishpan a proper washing with soap and hot water, and hung it up in its place without another word.

## A DAUGHTER OF THE PRAIRIE

MRS. HARRIS had come to see us again. Mrs. Harris was one of the periodical visitors I mentioned before. I don't know why she came, nor why she came so often, nor why she stayed so long. I don't really know where she lived, except that it was somewhere far from us, where conditions of life were far more advanced than they were on the prairie—at least that is what she gave us to understand. I have a notion that she was a widow; her freedom of movement and her lack of imperative calls on her time would indicate that. When she came to see us there never seemed to be any reason why she should go home. I don't think that she had any children, either. The peerless children whose virtues she used to mention at apt moments as worthy of our emulation, seem to have been nieces and nephews. She once brought one of these nieces out with her on a visit, and we played with the girl on terms of remote toler-

ance until we found by some accidental comparison of experience that *we*—it was hard to believe—had also been held up as examples for emulation to *her* and her family. After that we got along very well indeed.

When a letter arrived from Mrs. Harris announcing her approaching arrival, my mother used to look over at my father with a funny little twitch of her eyebrows—no more; and my father would give a faint shrug to his shoulders and slide down a little farther in his chair—no more. And neither of them thought that we noticed it or, noticing, would draw any deductions.

Anyway, there was never a chance to ask if there were a Mrs. Harris. We had no opportunity to doubt it, either when she was there, or when she was gone, or when she was about to come back. She brought with her an outside element, such as no one else carried. The most of our visitors subordinated or ignored their own natural circumstances for the moment, while they interested themselves in ours. They either felt or simulated a polite regard for the place they were visiting and the affairs of their



hosts. It is true they were sometimes impelled to institute comparisons with the East, such as hinted at lacks or drawbacks in our habitat. But generally courtesy bridled their expression; and they kindly saw what merits we had, and made conversation about them.

But it was not so with Mrs. Harris. Her talk ran on as if she had not left her rootage in Pennsylvania or Ohio, or wherever it was. Her topics were precisely the same as they would have been had my mother been her neighbor in the two-story Queen Anne residence next door to her own. None of our interests deflected the current of her thoughts or opinions. I used to listen, in the early days when my curiosity about the active world first awoke, to her steady discourse, thinking it might contain picturings of life. But I found that Mrs. Harris knew no such thing as impersonal interest. Her provinciality was rooted deep. To her nothing was interesting in itself—only as it was interesting to herself. I found that she would not serve my purposes at all.

There was one thing in particular in which Mrs. Harris showed her exotic quality. If

there was any one thing which distinguished prairie life, it was that no one talked much about money. Such talk was simply not there at all. I suppose there must have been a current of consideration of costs and prices and markets running along under the more important matters of life. Certainly there were some things we could have and some we could not. But who wanted luxury, anyway? We did not know what the relative financial standing of our visitors was—or even of our neighbors, for that matter, although we guessed that some were poor and others were not.

With Mrs. Harris it was different. *Poor* was not a mysterious, half-romantic word with her. She knew every man's income, or had her own shrewd estimate of it. "He is rich" often dropped from her respectful lips. She could discourse for hours—and did—on the furnishing of her friends' houses and their physical equipment for living. She mentioned prices and values. Figures came aptly to her tongue, and she knew what people paid for things; much seemed to depend on that. As for us, we heard prices mentioned, to be sure, but as prac-

tical facts, not as matter for admiration. Not even the men who bought land talked so much about money as Mrs. Harris did.

That and comparison of East and West were her most natural themes; I should say contrast, for in her own phrase there was no comparison. Nobody's language but Mrs. Harris's—and only large quantities of hers—could adequately express her pitying condemnation of everything west of the Ohio line. Nothing but a roving disposition and a recurrent touch of asthma would have brought her out beyond that border of civilization. Her steady disapproval of us brought little disturbance to our fireside or our veranda, however. My father surreptitiously read and my mother placidly sewed, only dropping sometimes a quiet little whimsicality into an accidental interstice in the monody of Mrs. Harris. We, with the easy superiority of childhood to maturity, went on indifferent, aware of a sort of atmospheric disquiet, but undisturbed by it. So much adult talk was negligible that this was hardly distinguishable from the rest.

But this visit of Mrs. Harris was different

from the others—different for me, I mean. For this year, being quite old and having finished the Fifth Reader, and all the mental arithmetic and chronological recapitulations that were taught at the white schoolhouse on the other side of the section, I was to be sent away to learn something more. And, Mrs. Harris's visit falling aptly at the right time, she was to convey me east with her to a place for further information. That now gave Mrs. Harris a factitious interest for me as a means to a glorious end.

Nobody can tell what those days are before you first go away to school. Anyway, so many people know already that it is not necessary to try to tell. You are oscillated back and forth between bewildering extremes of feeling. You turn from contemplating a farewell deep and long as time to anticipate a future luminous, alluring, an ecstasy-compelling combination of the certain and the unknown. For the first time in your life you are conscious of a great beginning of things; everything up to this point has been merely a continuity. As you look back on

it, it seems undramatic, unexciting. But ah, the future!

No wonder I tolerated Mrs. Harris. I even questioned her. I alternated in my own conversation between somewhat exacting practical suggestion regarding my equipment, and vague forecasts of imminent glories. One thing was certain: I should not come back the same person I went away. I felt as if I were allowing my family their last intercourse with one who would soon be no more. At the same time I was enjoying certain special attentions and tacit remission of duties, which showed how pleasant home might be made all the time if the elders would only take responsibility less seriously.

It was a part of this general indulgence, I suppose, that my suggestion to accompany my father on a long afternoon drive in that last week received thoughtful attention. My desire proved to be only the nucleus for other desires, however; I could not have surmised that I was originating so attractive a notion. Mrs. Harris suddenly perceived that she would like to go along. My father threw an appealing

glance at my mother, and she also decided to go. Another minute added a visiting uncle, and Ellen, at his urging. The driving party was complete—without me! I stood aghast at my own results. Where was my late-grown importance? My mother caught my look and found a way.

“How would you like to ride Pete and go along beside us?” she asked. “That would do, wouldn’t it?” she appealed to my father.

Yes, it would do. For me it would barely do, as I seemed to be crowded out of the grown-up party. Still it would be going somewhere, and if anything interesting occurred I should be a participator in it. I saddled Pete—with Ellen’s old saddle—and was ready. There had been a time when I rode Henry’s saddle, but that period was behind me. Pete, too, was an inheritance. But never mind; the day of my own things was about to begin.

I had done what I could to make Pete my own by renaming him, when Henry, after training and playing with Old Kate’s son, Charlemagne, from his earliest colthood, adopted him for his riding horse and left the pony to me. I ac-

cepted the discard with unwonted gratitude, and called him Giafar. As Pete seemed unaware of it, it probably did him no harm. I always had to say Pete before he attended to me, anyway. He had come to be known in the family as Pete Giafar.

It was an early September day, of course, a day to make one think of ripe grapes and of drowning out bumble-bees, and ripe Bartlett pears falling on the yellowing grass, and Hydrangea blossoms beginning to turn russet and red, and of the first day of school. Sunflowers and all their smaller and yellower kin stood golden in neglected hollows, and the misty purple of massed tickle-grass crowded occasional fence-corners. Even in the early afternoon the air was vivid—a sort of companionable air.

Although I had hardly acknowledged it in the beginning, this was really an adventure for me. In prospect of the great things that were in store I had chosen it merely to fill in time, and at first I only trailed along after the others, dreaming of the next week, and the next after that, and the next, and—ah me! Who could

tell it? But gradually as we followed along the corn-bordered roads with their variegation of hill and hollow I became aware that this hope of future joy was only a substratum for present happiness. Of course it is always a good thing while you are enjoying one pleasure to know that another is following on its heels. At this moment everything was the more satisfactory because I believed that that satisfaction was likely to be a continuous state. But, after all, this situation itself was an interesting, almost an exciting, experience. Riding Pete Giafar was no novelty, but riding away on a long trip like this was. I didn't even know where we were going, for after two or three miles we took a direction that was new to me—at least I could not remember having gone that way before. My independent position combined the entertainment, such as it was, of adult society, with some of the delights of solitude. Sometimes a level stretch invited the pony to canter and me to show off my horsemanship, and I darted ahead, even putting a hill or two between me and the others, and pretended that I was going alone. Sometimes I



lagged far behind. The air, as I say, was companionable, and the country was full of that happy announcement of completeness which early fall brings. Sunshine and dreams and a pony—what more could anyone ask?

Presently the country grew distinctly strange to me. We passed houses I had never seen before. Bits of woods, scanty enough, sprang up across our path, and an occasional creek, ploughing down between its banks and carrying away as much as it could of its loosely packed basin. Even our most eager partizans had little to say of our streams. Interest in the new neighborhood made me ride up beside my father to see what he was saying about it. He was not saying much. The conversation was chiefly in the hands of Mrs. Harris. Mrs. Harris was a paragrapher in dialogue. My uncle was teasing Ellen in jocular asides, and my father was throwing in explanatory comments as opportunity offered. But Mrs. Harris was paragraphing.

Mrs. Harris could be called a monochromatic talker. Whatever she was saying, one got very much the same impression from it. When she

paused occasionally and my mother dropped in a quiet, humorous little remark—calculated, I am sure, to keep my father and uncle patient—it was as if all the sound in the world had stopped for a minute. My mother's voice seemed like silence itself in comparison. And yet I am sure that Mrs. Harris was not a loud talker. It was only her ideas that were noisy.

She was talking now, appropriately, about the country. I listened perforce, because I was watching to snap up the first chance for throwing in some questions of my own. When Mrs. Harris was talking that required great alertness on the part of a child. My father sometimes had better luck. He had managed to say that the object of his expedition was to negotiate for some seed wheat.

“Do people out here really have something to sell?” Mrs. Harris was exclaiming. “It doesn't seem possible.” That was the beginning of a paragraph. My father turned his far-sighted prairie eyes upon the acres of tall, richly-eared corn to his left, and then flicked Pete playfully with the whip and dropped an amused glance on Ellen.

Mrs. Harris's ideas were what might be called extra-urban. Her next paragraph began, "I wonder whether this country will ever be really inhabitable. I suppose you will have towns in the course of time, but you do sacrifice so much while you are waiting," with sympathetic plaintiveness. She went on to set forth the privations of the life we knew, "so far from everything," she reiterated.

"I certainly feel sorry for you, doing without so many things." She proceeded to enumerate some of them. My own substratum of happy expectation had consisted largely of some of these very things, but as I attended to Mrs. Harris's forceful listing of them it suddenly crumbled away. Were they, after all, so attractive as I had thought?

We rounded a corner in our road just at this point, and on one side turned away from the bordering corn-land. To our right now lay open prairie, the first we had touched. My father looked across it with the look he always gave to the prairie. I had seen it before and knew it.

"Isn't it the most desolate-looking thing!"

exclaimed Mrs. Harris. "I don't see how anyone stands it. If it were only plowed up it would be a little better. But it certainly is a dreary spectacle this way. And such a waste!"

"It won't be a waste long," answered my father quietly. "This will all be broken up this fall. It is the last big piece of grass in the county," he added regretfully.

Everybody was quiet a minute, even Mrs. Harris. Suddenly I struck Pete Giafar with my little whip, and wheeled away from the road. I turned to look at my mother, and she nodded acquiescence. The destination my father had pointed out was only a mile farther on, anyway; and, besides, nothing happened to anyone out on the prairie. I flicked Pete again, and we headed out into the open grass. The others drove on, and I heard Mrs. Harris begin to talk again. I caught the words "useless" and "dreary" and "empty," and I sped on.

Indignation shortened my sight at first. It is always a novel sensation to find yourself suddenly a keen partisan of something to which you had always supposed yourself indifferent. The prairie—steadily decreasing sections of it

—had lain near us all my short life, and I had regarded it first as deplorable and then as only tolerable. Later still I began to find elements of delight in it, as on the wonderful day when I rode off in a mover wagon to a green world of joy. That discovery I began to regard as evidence of catholicity of taste in me. I was rather proud of my discernment of values. And yet I suspect that there was in my small mind even then a little patronage of the great acres of grass. Mrs. Harris's scorn now whiffled me about in one bewildering instant. With her behind me and the prairie before me, I committed myself to a partisanship I had never yet felt.

It was a day and a moment to draw such allegiance. The sun lay golden on the stretch of grass before me. Acre upon acre it lay spread out. I ignored the cornfields behind and to the left of me, and looked only straight ahead.

September had been at work here, too. No harvest had been taken from this natural growth, and the grass stood long and uncut. Ripeness lay on it, as it lay on the browning

cornfields. A mellowness that did not belong to the sunshine alone was in the color of the whole. The green had been touched with brown and with yellow; and in the lower clumps of grass-blades I could see, as the wind tossed the taller stems aside, hints of the golden rose which it would all bear in winter. The whole expanse carried a vague richness of color which the clear, fresh green of the earlier months did not have. Even that gracious day in June held no loveliness greater than this.

To-day there lay over it all the warm September haze, a herald of Indian summer glories that were to be. The crisp September wind swept the grass aside in places, or plowed into its depths, or smoothed it all one way, as if passing a hand over it. That made the diaphanous haze itself seem to lift and float and settle again, as if poising itself on the grass tops and playing at lightness with them. It was so ethereal a thing that one could scarcely say where it was and where it was not, where it touched and where it vanished. It deepened in the distance and conserved the

sunlight, adding golden quality to my whole view.

Pete and I raced and raced toward this distance. I suppose our pace was really moderate, but the swishing grasses and the meeting wind made it seem tremendous. The prairie rolled out beyond us, rising on upslopes and descending into valleys gilded with September flowers. There lay whole masses of yellow, as if summer, knowing her time was short, had thrown out all her remaining color at once. It was the yellow season of the prairie year. One can't tell what a softness of swell and curve and what sweet loveliness of outline the prairie gives to whatever it clothes. Could there ever have been a time when I said "only green hills"? My eyes followed from hilltop to succeeding hilltop, led on and on by their fairness alone. Each one promised the beauty of the next one, and carried my look forward until it reached the upward slope which led to the horizon. When I found that, I came back to the nearer distance and began again to follow the grass on from slope to slope until I reached that horizon line once more. Even that did

not stop my thought—for I now knew more of horizons than I had once known—and I could fancy more hills following on around the long curve of the earth.

I kept on the higher ridges to widen my view, and rode on toward the gently changing skyline. I could conceive of nothing greater beyond it than other green hills and yet others. I had a sense of joyous possession of this expanse, as if something in it belonged to me, something superior to any practical ownership. It was to be plowed up, was it? Then perhaps I should be the last one so to ride and enjoy. This wonderful emptiness, which was a positive quality and not a negative one, a kind of self-ownership of the prairie, would give way to an occupation which was far emptier. So I mused vaguely, condemning cornfields. Surely miles of grass need promise nothing more than itself. Certainly it conveyed no sense of waiting for its function as it tossed and shone in the September sun.

No hint of decay lay in its coloring. For as its summer green passed away the coral tints at its roots would creep upward. All through



the coming winter it would lie there rosy and rich, gleaming pink through the light, wind-tossed snow or glowing warmly under our clear western sun. It would never have a moment of real deadness until its green appeared again in the early spring. And yet even this winter coloring would have a kind of austerity. Tropical richness was never suggested by even the deepest or thickest-growing grasses. Self-control was the note of the prairie, freedom which stopped short of wildness and richness short of luxuriance. Both the modified rose of winter and the green of summer had a reserve, a limit of expressiveness, which subtly stirred and invited the imagination. One could think much on the prairie.

The quiet was a part of the prairie mood. Like its emptiness, its silence was a definite thing. The quiet of the forest is a sort of hush, a conscious interdiction of sound. There is a kind of secrecy about it—a finger on lips. But the silence of the prairie is a frank, open thing. Out under the sky and the sun, with vision unrestricted, one may speak if he chooses, but in perfect content he refrains. The emptiness

and quiet have their own form of companionship. Even I felt it, as Pete carried me along toward the horizon and the sun.

We got out of the range of the cornfields and the road at last. Wherever I looked there was only grass. Grasses touched the sky-line all around. As on that other day which now came back to me vividly, there was nothing apparent but the sky and the grass and the sun and me. I seemed to be lifted almost to the level of the other elements by being allowed association with them. And yet I felt a sort of vast humility, too, a kind of gratitude for belonging to the place. I brought Pete Giafar to a pause while I tasted this consciousness for a moment. It had a degree of novelty. For in all my successive moments of delight in the prairie before I had never committed myself to complete satisfaction in it. It had never possessed me.

I slipped off the pony to get my feet into the grass. It seemed more definitely related to me, with its soft roots underfoot and its tops brushing my skirts. Pete welcomed this opportunity to supplement his noon meal, and nibbled along

behind me, tugging at the end of his bridle reins. Mooning along thus, I did not at first notice that my path was going to angle across that of two horsemen who were also riding at large. A mere glance showed that one was a native and one was not. Their horsemanship alone told me that the East and the West had met. One cantered easily, subordinate to the movement of his horse; for the other riding was merely a series of meetings and partings with his saddle. I could easily imagine what mingled indignation and mirth his technique had inspired in every man who had seen him that day.

He turned a cool look upon me as they approached, the look of one to whom a meeting with a stranger is nothing; the other man drew in his horse a little as he called solicitously,

“You ain’t lost, are you, miss?”

I answered, “No, sir,” and pointed with my whip toward the road. I noted at the same time his saying “miss”; until very recent times I had been “sissy.” This seemed to be a very nice man.

They went on talking and pointing, and as my path drew away from theirs I heard, above the soft footfalls of our horses, such phrases as "the section line runs," "the corner-stone ought to lie," and "begin to break up."

The meaning of their inspection flashed across me. This was one of those "eastern owners" of whom we were always hearing, mysterious, erratic, unappreciative persons, who held land not for homes, but for speculation. They were held half in awe, half in contempt, by the neighbors of their land.

This section was evidently, as my father had said, to be broken up at once. A man who couldn't ride—according to our standards—and who didn't know people, had the authority to take away the prairie. Soon long brown lines would divide its wonderful surface into parallel sections, and the lines would broaden and the sections narrow until there was nothing of them left. And next year an uneven, undersized, yellowish crop of sod-corn would take the place of this full, rich, pleasant growth. The grass under my feet would never reach its promised winter rosiness and would

never turn again into its rare spring green. And no other would ever come to take its place. The prairie could never be reinstated in any degree. I did not know that then, but to childhood everything that happens looks irrevocable. One has a completer conception of eternity then than he ever has afterward. I knew fully that this was the last time I should ever stand alone on the prairie, with only grass and sky and sun filling my eyes.

I walked on for a long time with a feeling that I was doing a sort of rite, making a conscious farewell. At twelve any sort of conscious feeling—unless it involves real discomfort—has a precipitate of pleasure. There was a kind of worth in my feeling now which raised it almost to the level of great emotion. Anyway, I had found that the prairie, too, had romance—and that romance was about to pass away. It had been there all the time and I had not seen it. I mounted Pete and rode slowly back with the wind to the place where my father would expect to find me on his return. It was a sober little girl that greeted them all. They thought that I was tired of waiting and

that I had been lonesome. Mrs. Harris commiserated me plaintively. My father smiled quietly at me, though. He knew that one was not lonely on the prairie.

THE END

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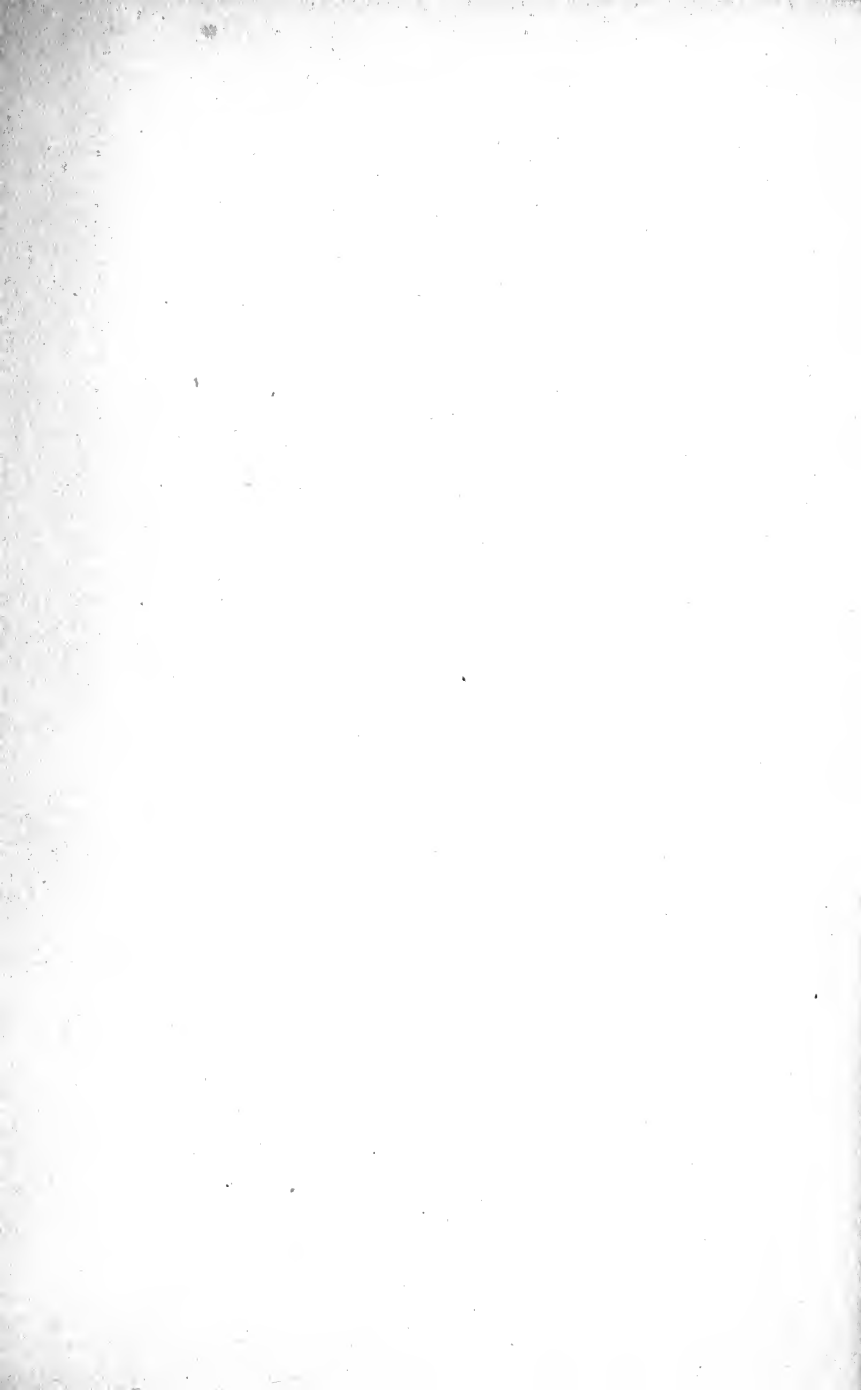
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